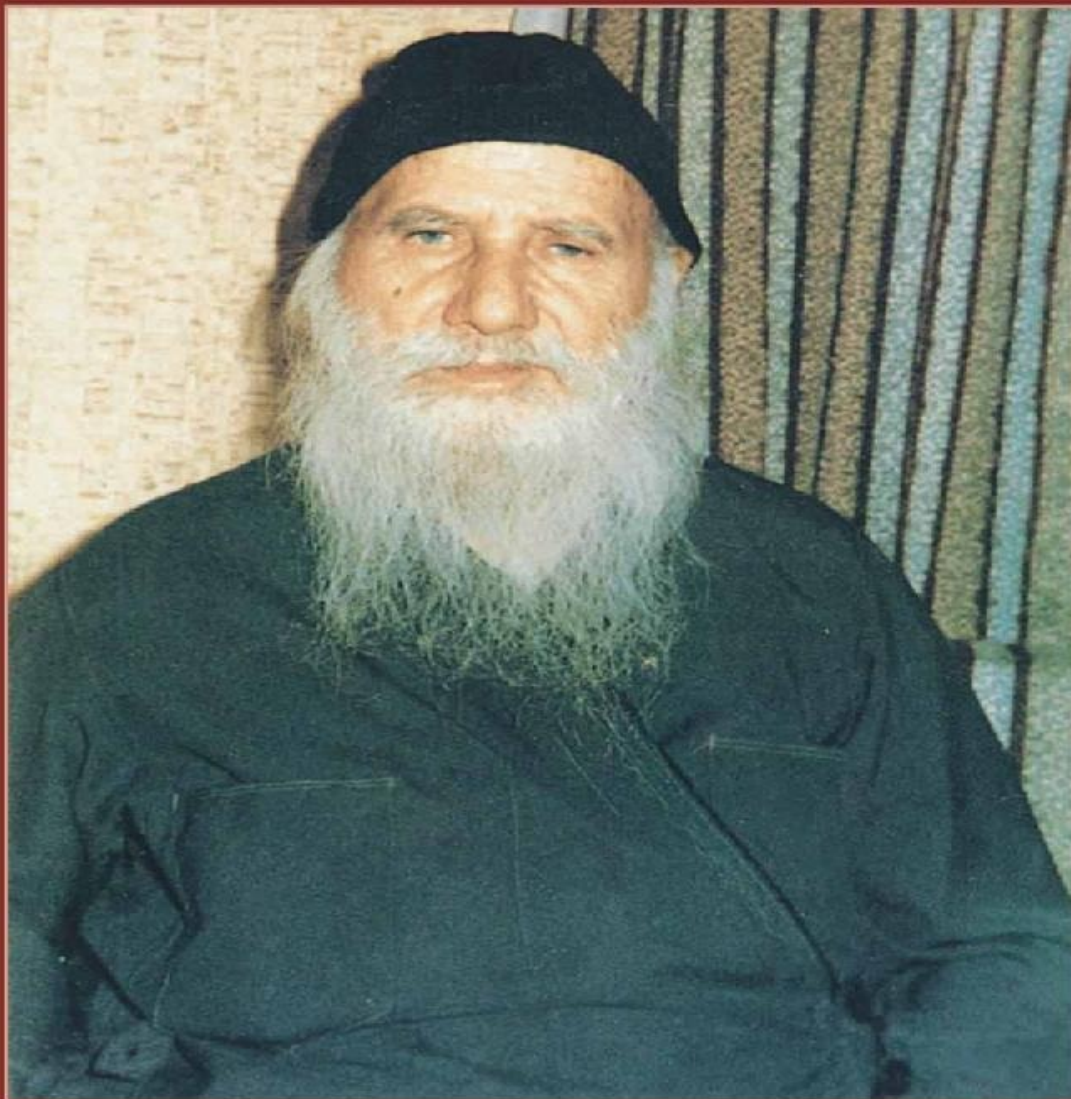


Constantine Yiannitsiotis

# With Elder Porphyrios

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A spiritual child remembers



Translated from the third Greek edition by Marina Robb

PUBLICATIONS

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF THE SAVIOR

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MILESSI 2013

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CONSTANTINE YIANNITSIOTIS

WITH ELDER PORPHYRIOS  
A Spiritual Child Remembers

PUBLICATIONS  
**THE TRANSFIGURATION OF THE SAVIOR**  
MILESSI 2013

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## Translator's Preface

*Elder Porphyrios was a holy man of our time. His life and teaching convey the simple message that “Christ is Everything” and that we are all called to participate in the Life of Christ. We are all called to become holy ourselves, through God’s Grace. Elder Porphyrios perhaps seems extraordinary to us, since he approached this calling. Yet, he was, in fact, very “ordinary” and simple in the way that he conducted himself and spoke throughout his life. He used very vivid, colloquial speech. In fact, his language is so simple and direct, it may surprise some English speakers. We tend to consign saints to the past, to history, and then expect them to speak like characters from Dickensian novels or Shakespearean plays. Elder Porphyrios belies that myth. He used the everyday language of the late Twentieth Century. While having no claims to being a professional translator, I have tried to keep the lively immediacy of his speech, without losing the essence of what he is saying.*

*Nevertheless, the use of some unfamiliar terms is unavoidable. Many Greek terms have no exact equivalents in English. I have kept the word ‘nous’ in its original form. It is often translated ‘mind’ or ‘intellect’. In fact, it is the ‘eye of the heart’ by which we may know God, in prayer. Consequently, ‘prayer of the nous’ or ‘noetic prayer, is the method of prayer using this faculty. More commonly, it refers to what is known as the Jesus Prayer. Another term that remains the same is eros’. The translators of the Philokalia define this as ‘intense longing.’ It is in fact, the strong feeling of attraction and desire between two people, characterised by a longing for union; in this case union with God.*

*Scriptural references are taken mainly from the New King James Version, with some adaptation where necessary. This is especially true of the Old Testament where the (3rd-2nd Century BC) Greek Septuagint (LXX) text of the Old Testament used by the Orthodox Church differs significantly, in parts, from the (6th-10th Century AD) Hebrew Masoretic text that most English translations are based on. Bearing this in mind, the numbering follows the Hebrew text to aid the English speaking reader.*

*As far as possible I have tried to provide explanations in footnotes for places and topics that may be unfamiliar to the English speaker. Hopefully, this has not unduly burdened the text. The translation has been made into my native British English, with some adaptation to make it more accessible for readers in the New*

*World. Please forgive any mistakes, errors or omissions.*

*I am indebted to the Abbess, Mother Ferronia, and the sisters of the Transfiguration of the Saviour Convent for their hospitality over the years. Also, to Mr. G. A. for his encouragement, advice and support. I must also thank Mother Photini and the sisters of the Birth of the Theotokos Monastery for their own special contribution to this book. May the prayers of Elder Porphyrios help us all.*

Marina Robb  
Pentecost 2000

## Publisher's Foreword

*Those who have chosen to spend their lives in a Monastery would prefer to be silent. Silence is a precious treasure. The harder it is to acquire the easier it is to lose. Without silence we are unable to hear the continual glorification, which is offered up to God by the whole of creation, from the humble little flower to the proud soaring eagle, from the tranquil lake to the rough sea, from the bright sun to the countless tiny stars, from the hermit to the hosts of heavenly angels, from wailing babes to the intellectual with his penetrating thoughts. Neither can we, without silence, listen to the whisperings of our conscience, the voice of God breathing within us like a light breeze, which will reveal our poverty and will make us desire the wealth of the good Father, Who is waiting for us to return to his arms.*

*Yet, there are times, when he who has chosen the path of silence is obliged to speak. "When a Christian finds Christ, when he knows Christ, when Christ dwells within his own little soul and he feels Him, he wants to shout it out and tell it everywhere; he wants to talk about Christ, to say what Christ is, he wants to say - love Christ and put nothing before His Love. Christ is Everything, He is the source of life, the ultimate desire, He is everything. Everything beautiful is in Christ."*

*It would be presumptuous to claim that we know Christ in this way and this is the reason why we are speaking. In his great mercy, God favoured us, His lost sheep, so that we would come to know the person who spoke the above words, and who added. "In my silence, at all times, I try to live like that. I don't live like that.*

*But, hey... I try."* We did not even get to know him, the late Elder Porphyrios, and even then, not as well as we should have, although we lived with him for many years. Therefore, we asked all his friends and acquaintances to write down whatever they remembered. Now, we are also asking you to write down and send us whatever you remember from your conversations with him "as a personal reminder." So that we may recall them, bring them together, open our closed hearts and blind eyes, and see that this Elder managed to enter the uncreated Church of Christ. Maybe we will rouse our sluggish will and bloodless heart towards the love of Christ, open the door of our soul and allow Him to dwell within us.

*Many people replied to this invitation of ours. One person would record their narration on cassette for us, another would write it down, and others were simply told to us, either in person or over the telephone. Many are still awaiting their turn.*

*One of those people was our dear Constantine, who is now in heaven. In the summer of 1993, not only did he bring us a few notes, but this whole book that you are now holding in your hands. He gave us permission to use it however we saw fit. He was satisfied as long as its use would please Elder Porphyrios, be beneficial to souls, and would glorify God.*

*After studying it carefully, we concluded that it was best to present it to you in its original form, with only a few additions and improvements. In this way, it would be spiritually beneficial, so that you may also glorify God, Who is wondrous in His saints, together with us. Moreover, Elder Porphyrios would also be pleased, seeing our love towards Christ increase.*

*Therefore, we have broken our silence, this time from joy, because we have found even in this text, signposts on the way that lead to our life's final destination, to the truly desired, to our Christ. Naturally, as with all human works, the colouring and the views of the author can be found in this book. One may see for oneself that in some matters certain opinions are overemphasized and the importance of others are diminished. Nevertheless, inevitable though it is, it is preferable to complete silence. Let us simply pray that the grace of the Holy Spirit will act upon the readers, as it did upon those who heard the sermon of the apostles on the Sunday of Pentecost (Acts 2:6-8), so that each will understand their "own tongue," in as much as it is needed for their own salvation and so that no-one is scandalized.*

*Let us also pray that God give rest to the writer in the land of the living, together with Elder Porphyrios, and that He makes us all worthy to meet both of them again some time. Since with their counsel we will have passed through life's high seas successfully and with their prayers, we will have reached the eternal harbour of New Jerusalem. Let us thank everyone who laboured to give us this beautiful book. There are too many of them and they are too modest to allow us to mention each one by name.*

The Holy Convent of the Transfiguration of the Savior  
Milessi, 5 March 1994 Saturday of All-Souls



## A letter from Elder Porphyrios to his Spiritual Children<sup>[1]</sup>

*My dear spiritual Children,*

*Now that I am still in charge of my faculties, I want to give you some advice.*

*Ever since I was a child, I was always in sin. When my mother sent me to watch the flock on the mountain, (My father had gone to work on the Panama Canal for us, his children, because we were poor). I slowly read, word by word, the life of St. John the Hut-Dweller as I shepherded the flock, and I loved St. John very much. I said a lot of prayers, like the young child that I was, twelve or fifteen years old, I don't remember too well. I wanted to follow his example. So, with a lot of difficulty, I secretly left my parents and came to Kavso-kalyvia on the Holy Mountain. I became obedient to two Elders, the true brothers, Panteleimon and Ioannikios.*

*They happened to be very devout and full of virtue. I loved them very much and because of that, with their blessing, I gave them absolute obedience. This helped me a lot. I also felt great love for God and got along very well. But, because of my sins, God allowed me to become ill, and my Elders told me to go to my parents in my village of St. John, Evia (Euboea). Although I had sinned a lot from when I was a small child, when I returned to the world I continued to commit sins which, today are very many. The world, however, thought highly of me, and everyone shouts that I'm a saint.*

*I however, feel that I am the most sinful person in the world. Of course, whatever I remembered I confessed, and I know God has forgiven me. But now I have the feeling that my spiritual sins are very many and I ask everyone who has known me to pray for me, because, for as long as I lived, I humbly prayed for you, too. Now that I'm leaving for heaven, I have the feeling that God will say to me, "What are you doing here?" I have only one thing to say to him, "I am not worthy of here, Lord, but whatever Your love wills, it'll do for me." From then on, I don't know what will happen. I, however, wish for God's love to act.*

*I always pray that my spiritual children will love God, who is Everything, so that He will make us worthy to enter His earthly uncreated Church. We must begin from here. I always made the effort to pray, to read the hymns of the Church, the Holy Scripture and the Lives of the Saints. May you do the same. I tried, by the grace of God, to approach God and may you also do the same.*

*I beg all of you to forgive me for whatever I did to upset you.*

Hieromonk Porphyrios Kavsokalyvia,  
June 4/17 1991

- [\[1\]](#) While at the Holy Skete of Kavsokalyvia on Mt. Athos, the Elder Porphyrios had given orders for his grave to be dug. He dictated a farewell letter of advice and forgiveness to all his spiritual children, through a spiritual child of his. The above is letter as it was found amongst the monk's garments that were laid out for his burial on the day of his departure.

## Author's Prologue

*"I've got important things to tell you, but what am I to do with you? You sit there and write it all down and you talk about it. Don't write it down, kid, don't talk about it." The Elder's charming reprimands are still ringing in my ears. From the first time that I met him, when I was trying to tame my enthusiasm, I gradually wrote and spoke less and less so that I could hear more and more. Now, picking up my pen to write, after so many years, I feel a kind of apprehension. I've got the feeling that I'll hear his voice again, telling me off, as he did then. However, I am now certain that he will not dissuade me this time, but will encourage me. He has already encouraged me with his farewell letter, where, shortly before his death he exhorts us to do the same as him, "to read the hymns of the Church, the Holy Scripture and the Lives of the Saints." But how could we read about the lives of the saints if certain people hadn't given us the facts? If they hadn't written about their works and teachings as completely as they possibly could? I am also obliged to give the facts, in so far as it is possible. But what facts? Those that exist in my minimal notes? A great weight now falls to memory, mainly from certain cautious accounts given to friends with the Elder's direct blessing. One day, while at Kallisia, I voiced my grievance to the Abbess. Why didn't the Elder let me keep notes and talk about them? I only ever write a few brief notes, for myself alone. I only ever talk to friends who have spiritual interests and I see the benefit they gain. The Abbess replied, "Don't wait for the Elder himself to tell you to write it down and to talk about it. If you, yourself, think that it's beneficial, tell your friends." If the Elder had allowed me to keep notes, I would have had plenty of material at my disposal. It seems, however, that he had a reason for disallowing it. I now intuitively feel that, if he had not put brakes on my hasty enthusiasm, I could have created pitfalls for him, for others and for myself. Now, though, those dangers no longer exist. Temptation's darts of pride can no longer reach him now.*

*Nobody can be jealous or scandalized by the revelation of his divine gifts. On the contrary, many people will benefit, first and foremost me, a sinner, whose salvation the Elder took, and still takes, so much care of. This is why I entreat the Elder to help my memory with his prayers to the Lord.*

Constantine Yannitsiotis

## 1. FIRST ENCOUNTER

I was going through a trial that I had never experienced before. It was a trial of great length and great intensity, which threatened to tear me apart both physically and spiritually. I was vulnerable because the wound came from somewhere where I had innocently expected support or, at the very least, understanding. I was at a complete dead end and I did not know what to do, because I saw a totally unacceptable solution in all the choices open to me. I had heard something about some hieromonk called Fr. Porphyrios who had the gift of foresight and who could usually be found at Kallisia in Pendeli<sup>[1]</sup>. I got leave from work, a blessing from my spiritual father, and took the bus to a certain point. I then continued on foot through the forest. I was alone and without a guide. The road branched off in to so many pathways that, in the end, I could not find the monastery and turned back in the rain. In the days that followed the situation became explosive. I could put the whole thing down to one event, and I didn't know if it was from the devil or from God. I met my spiritual father and told him my dilemma. If it came from God, I was prepared to accept it, however much it would cost me; if, however, it came from the devil I was determined to fight it to the end. My spiritual father, a man of rare genius, humility and love, was both forgiving towards those who had created the problem for me, while at the same time pointed out what must be done (something I had difficulty in accepting). However, when faced with my dilemma he stopped. He did not offer me his opinion but said: "The person capable of answering your difficult question is Elder Porphyrios. I don't know what you'll have to do, ask, phone, search, until you find him. He will solve the puzzle for you. Afterwards, come back and we'll talk about it again. Until then I can't tell you anything on the matter." I expressed my fear that, with what he had to say, he might tie down my freedom. He replied that Fr. Porphyrios is discerning and never ties anyone down, on the contrary, he respects the freedom of others. He also gave me the telephone numbers of three people who knew him.

From that moment on armed with this "referral" from my spiritual father I

From that moment on, armed with the counsel from my spiritual father, I started the search to uncover Elder Porphyrios. At the time, the Elder did not have a permanent abode. I phoned two of the people who had contact with him, but got no answer. Fortunately, I found the third, who was more than willing to put me in touch with the Elder as soon as he could. Days, even weeks, passed by and I kept phoning my stranger, but he did not have any relevant news.

Until... late one afternoon, as I was walking home from work engulfed in the sorrow that had burdened my soul for months, I suddenly felt something unexpected within me. The clouds of sorrow dissolved, a bright warmth comforted me with calmness and I felt like singing.

I secretly made the sign of the cross over myself, again and again and whispered full of disquiet: "Lord have mercy!" I knew myself well enough in such situations. These kinds of problems needed time for me to get over them; the sorrow always declined gradually. Since I was at the very centre of my trial, what did this sudden and unexpected shift from sorrow to joy mean? However, a few minutes later, that joy vanished and the sorrow returned. This strange happening was to repeat itself in the days that followed. The mystery was solved when I was informed much later that my stranger, who was to become an exceptional friend, had contacted the Elder and had given him my name and it had been placed on his prayer list.

In the meantime, I impatiently waited to see the Elder. At last, one spring morning, I heard a lady's voice - it was the churchwarden of the chapel of St. Gerasimos at the Polyclinic Hospital<sup>[2]</sup>. She told me that Elder Porphyrios would be able to see me at 10 a.m. in the chapel. I went down to Omonia Square immediately. Various emotions inundated me on the way: Hopeful expectation, uneasiness, curiosity, reservation. What could an elderly, poorly educated monk possibly say about my problem!

I arrived at the chapel and waited. When my turn came, I went up to the confession room. A small-framed little old father was waiting for me. I was impressed as soon as he approached me. I kissed his hand and sat opposite him. He looked at me from behind his glasses with a couple of bright blue and lively eyes. Throughout that moment, I felt that his gaze was piercing my soul. I felt that this person knew me already. I noticed, at the same time, that his lips were whispering something and I realised that he was praying continuously. He gave the impression that he both was and was not present, that he was both here and elsewhere at the same time.

He opened his mouth and I heard his voice for the first time - refined, calm and charming. "Well then, what do you want to tell me?"

I remembered my spiritual father's advice and put my problem to him very briefly, no longer than five minutes and then I fell quiet. The Elder listened

thoughtfully and sighed every now and then. I had the feeling that he was suffering my pain more than I was. Then I was bombarded by a host of novel surprises. The Elder analysed my character with great care. He described and gave reasons for both my faults and my merits with such accuracy that even my own parents could not have come close to it. I saw own self for the very first time, as I really am and not as I would like to be. This self-revelation was a moving experience for me. It gave me the impression that I was born, or rather re-born. Afterwards the Elder came to my problem. He shed light on it and explained it from all points of view. Both from my point of view and from that of the other people who were involved. With great sympathy he pointed the correct and mistaken moves taken by myself and by the others, whose characters he also described. Then he assured me that the event that led to the dead-end dilemma was a temptation from the devil. He advised me about the way to face it. My spiritual father had suggested the same method.

Then he caught hold of my hand and took my pulse and pointed out my bodily sicknesses. This diagnosis was a summary of the sicknesses discovered by my doctor years before; it was also an explanation for them. Finally, he blessed me by making the sign of the cross over my head and said with much love, "Well, get going now and we'll talk again the next time we meet."

I got up, kissed his hand. Overcome with emotions of wonder, peace and joy I went towards the door. There, I turned right around and stood still, looking at him as though thunderstruck and trying to comprehend all the unbelievable things that had just happened to me - things that challenged my innate disbelief and rationalism. The Elder looked at me, smiled and said, "Why did you stop? Just do what I told you." I replied, "Elder, I didn't stop because I felt it was difficult to do what you told me, but rather to express my surprise. What you have told me to do is exactly what my spiritual father advised me to do. But, while I had some inner difficulty with him, with you, the way you explain the problem, I have no difficulty at all with continuing, not in thought, not in my heart, not in will. On the contrary, I feel that I would have rejected all other solutions other than the one you gave. It fits me perfectly, like a glove. I shall carry it out with pleasure." A broad grin lit up the Elder's face, which shined with joy, and added: "Go, go on now."

I bowed to him and left. As I went on my way, spiritually enchanted by the discovery of a real starets<sup>[3]</sup>, I realised the most wonderful thing of all the things that he had surprisingly revealed to me. With unrivalled pastoral skill the Elder was able to calm my troubled soul, in a brief amount of time, and to make me joyfully desire what I had rejected just a short while before: God's will regarding

my complicated problem. I do not know if there is anything higher or greater than wanting to conform your will to the will of God and to find a saintly Elder in your life, who will make that desire achievable. In meeting Elder Porphyrios, I also got to know a new, surprisingly attractive, Christ for the first time in all the thirty years that I had heard much talk about Christ.

Making my way through the crowded and noisy streets of the centre of the capital, absorbed by various thoughts, emotions and decisions, I didn't even notice that I had arrived at my place of work. I went to the office and I felt that the first thing I needed to do was to take up a pen and paper and write down that superb conversation with the Elder. My pen dashed across the paper, until I had completed the recollections still fresh in my mind. On the afternoon of the same day, I read the hand-written notes to my spiritual father. He was pleased when he heard that Fr. Porphyrios' advice about the matter coincided with his. He was also amazed by his gift of foresight, regarding what he had said to me. I asked him what his advice was regarding my future progress. He replied, "I don't even have one word to add to what Fr. Porphyrios told you. Do what he told you to do. I reached a certain point, when faced with your problem; Fr. Porphyrios went a lot higher because he has the gift. I am not even fit to loosen the straps of his sandals. Visit him when you can. You can only benefit. You cannot lose. Whatever I tell you holds until Fr. Porphyrios, when talking about that same matter, tells you something different. From then on, automatically, my opinion no longer holds but that of Fr. Porphyrios does." I was amazed at the humility and the spiritual honesty of my spiritual father. His words put me completely at ease. The road was now clear for further meetings with Fr. Porphyrios.

<sup>[1]</sup> A semi - forested area on the outskirts of Athens. For many years, Fr. Porphyrios lived a secluded life at the monastic dependency of St. Nicholas in the area of Kallisia. Translator.

<sup>[2]</sup> A General Hospital in Omonia Square in busy central Athens.

<sup>[3]</sup> A spiritual director. See explanation in Bishop Kallistos Ware's book «The Orthodox Way». Renseded. SVS Press, 1995, pp. 95-99- Also quoted in Elder Porphyrios. Testimonies and Experiences by K. Ioannidis pp. 23-32 available from the Publisher.

## 2. SECOND ENCOUNTER

However, despite the Elder's assurance that we would talk again, and despite having had a persuasive taste of his gift of foresight, I allowed rationalism to stir up doubts within me. Months had passed before our first meeting took place. The Elder did not have a permanent place to live and so, many other people search him out. Who knows when I'd get to see him again! Maybe never. Time passed by. My spiritual batteries, which had been filled by the Elder, gradually wore down. I phoned my stranger from time to time, asking if he had turned up anywhere, so that I could go and see him. He would answer me saying, "Not yet, but don't worry, the Elder has a "spiritual television" and when he "sees" that the time has come he'll turn up and we'll find out about it."

New words and expressions came into my life: "a spiritual television" that the Elder "sees" with. It was something that cheered me up, but at the same time raised doubts, which the Elder was to steadily remove.

Indeed, after about a month I was informed that the Elder was at a place just outside of Athens called Kallisia. I then set off with a friend who had a car and we found the way by asking. From then on, the foundations were laid for planning further visits. This was done with the help of information given over the phone by the Elder's spiritual children. We reached the Metochion<sup>[1]</sup> of St. Nicholas. It was an old stone Byzantine church, with murals worn by time and lit by candlelight. It had two small cells next to it and a room for receiving guests called an *archontariki*<sup>[2]</sup>. The place was roughly repaired to serve the needs of the Elder and his visitors, though the majority waited outside in the yard, due to the lack of space.

As soon as we entered the monastery we were faced with the Elder, all ready for a trip to Athens. We offered to take him ourselves and he accepted. It was a great favour from God. Walking through the forest in order to reach the clearing, where the car was parked, the Elder wanted to spend half the way keeping me company, and the other half with my friend. In this way, he could help us both.

The subject of our conversation was the progress I had made with my



The subject of our conversation was the progress I had made with my problem. While we were walking the Elder got tired and sat down on a rock, next to an old abandoned building. I also sat down beside him. There he performed an anatomy of my soul and revealed that the cause of my current problem was seated in a deeply traumatic experience I had gone through several decades before. I had driven it into my subconscious. The Elder was able, with surprising perceptiveness, to bring it to the surface again. He was able to link the seemingly invisible past with the visible present, by a relationship of cause and effect. Nobody could have characterised me more deeply than the Elder did at that moment. (Some five years later, when the Elder carried out an “internal examination” on me, which was linked to that revelation in the forest of Kallisia, I reminded him of it. I even mentioned the exact time, place and many other details. The Elder looked at me with a smile and said: “You remember everything about our meeting back then. Do you know the reason why you remember it? Because at that moment I showed you the most sensitive point of your soul which influenced all your life from then on, right up until this very moment.”)

We continued our afternoon walk in the forest and the Elder mentioned our first encounter. I told him that I had not forgotten it because it was a beginning of a new life for me and because I had written it down. I asked him if he would like me to read it to him and he agreed. So, I took the hand-written notes out of my pocket and read them to him. When I finished he said, with satisfaction, “Well, bless you, kid, you wrote it down, just as I said it. You know, that is the truth about you, just like I told it to you.” But I am afraid that the written notes were one of the reasons why he kept saying, for a long time, “Don’t write what I say down. Don’t talk about it.” It seems he realized that if he allowed me to write each and every conversation of ours down I would have worked like an open tape recorder beside him.

<sup>[1]</sup> A dependency of a monastery. A church, or other buildings, belonging to a monastery but not within the grounds of the monastery itself. *Translator*.

<sup>[2]</sup> An *archontariki* is a room set aside in a monastery for receiving visitors and offering them hospitality, sweets, coffee etc. The expression comes from the word *archontas* which means a gentleman, in that monks consider even the most lowly of people to be above themselves and therefore all visitors and guests are gentlemen, nobles. *Translator*.

### 3. DEPTH SOUNDING THE SOUL

At the beginning of my relationship with the Elder, I was impressed by the great ease with which he showed me truths about myself. Truths that only I knew - things which were secrets of my soul. It was impossible to get information about them from anywhere else, but from God, the knower of hearts. The Elder had a perfect knowledge about the conscious part of my soul. However, the more time passed and such revelations were repeated, they gradually became, in some way, routine. Now, the thing that impressed me was that the Elder, with the same ease, revealed truths to me that even I did not know about. It was obvious that he went down into the unconscious part of my soul, like a deep-sea diver. With the gifts given to him, he would light up the aspects of my soul never seen before, like a flash of lightening in the dark; aspects so definitive in the shaping of my life.

His revelations at Kallisia, by that ruined building, were just a foretaste. I cannot see that I gained satisfactory self-knowledge with this depth sounding. The patristic expression "Give blood to receive spirit" held true, but without doubt, it helped me make some tentative steps towards it. Tentative, because I was frightened by the depth of its darkness and its repeated painful surprises.

I suffered one such surprise when I visited him in the apartment of a large building. He was going through a period of convalescence after a dangerous heart attack (myocardial infarction) and was staying there as a guest of a spiritual daughter of his. He only saw a few visitors, and then only after a complicated telephone connection to find out where he was staying. In my impatience to see the Elder, I managed to note down the street name and the number of the apartment building, but not the floor that it was on. So, when I arrived, I looked at the names of the residents at the building entrance, but strangely the name of the hostess was not there.

I was saddened but not dismayed. I sought help from God, through the prayers of the Elder, and I started to read the names of the residents, floor by floor, from the ground floor to the seventh and back again. I didn't find the name I was

the ground floor to the seventh and back again. I didn't find the name I was looking for. I noticed that plenty of apartments were unlabelled, but I didn't want to cause a disturbance by asking strangers who lived there.

Tired and unsuccessful, I began to feel discouraged and I headed for the exit. "It seems that the Elder doesn't want my visit," I thought, but at that very moment, an unexplainable internal impulse made me turn back. A strange, irrational desire suddenly arose within me: to go up the stairs to the seventh floor, without looking at the names anymore. I climbed up slowly, step-by-step, to the first floor, and then the second and when I reached the third floor I saw the Elder in front of me, standing in the doorway of an apartment. He was waiting for me with a smile, saying: "Come, come... come on in" (When I left I noticed that there was no name outside the apartment.)

This was all so natural that when I realised how the event was beyond reason, I whispered: "Wondrous is God in his saints." I went in, setting down a box of sweets as a gift, and sat down jubilantly in front of the Elder, who was alone in the apartment at that moment. It was a very warm summer day and a rotating fan had been placed on the table. It annoyed the Elder every time it turned towards him, as he was already covered in perspiration. "Please make it stand still, or I will catch cold, and I shouldn't." I tried to find the right button but I could not manage it. The Elder came up to me and said, with charming simplicity, "Let me stop it, I know its tricks." As soon as he stopped it, he went and sat on his bed and continued with what he was doing: cutting out Byzantine icons from some calendars using scissors. "I like cutting out paper icons a lot," he said, "and then gluing them to wood. They become like real ones. They are beautiful." He then added, "What would you like to tell me?"

I started telling him about my various personal problems that I had noted down on a piece of paper, and waited for his answers. Towards the end, in an attempt to surpass myself, I assured him, while I did all the talking, that in the depths of my soul what I wanted to do, consciously, was to lay all my selfish problems, to live the higher life of self-offering to Christ and to my fellows. And I praised the advantages of the life of Divine Eros heavily.

Throughout this period of my rhetorical sanctity, the Elder's head was bowed and he became silent, absorbed in the cutting out of icons. He reminded me of a child, devoted to his toys, indifferent to what the adults around him are saying. I had the impression that I had unfolded the problem by myself and had also found the solution by myself. I confess this did not fill me with enthusiasm. And if that was not enough, at one point the Elder stopped his handiwork, to look at me with a smile and say: "Good, well you had better be Good, well you had better be going." I got up and kissed his hand, rather disappointed by the results of my whole expedition and somewhat bitter, because the Elder had not honoured my

deep self-analysis with the attention it deserved. But I did not say anything to him and headed for the door, while the Elder saw me off.

I had not yet managed to get into the elevator, when the lady of the house could be seen climbing the stairs. As soon as she saw me, she asked if I had had some coffee. I thanked her and said it was not necessary. I opened the door of the elevator. At that moment I heard the Elder's voice behind me saying, "Hey, come back now to have the coffee." I grabbed at the excuse, not being one who needed much asking to be near the Elder, and went back for coffee.

In a short while, sitting in the chair, with the coffee next to me, I listened to the Elder who had now put the scissors down, saying to me: "Well all the time you were sitting here and talking to me and telling me all the holy stuff you wanted to do (he mentioned it all briefly), do you know what I saw from all that?"

"What did you see, Elder?" I asked full of curiosity. The Elder abruptly, "The opposite. I also saw some other things, but I won't tell you about it." I froze in my seat and looked at him with embarrassment, like an actor who had assumed the role of a king and then had his purple robes suddenly taken away. "You'll forgive me," he continued, "for telling you it so abruptly, but think a lot deeper, look right down into your soul, isn't what I told you true?" I prayed silently, I tried to be more honest with myself, with the Elder and with God. I asked myself who I really am and confessed: "Elder, you were right. Those things that I said I wanted can be found on the shiny surface of my soul, but what I feel emerging from the depths, is all dark, sinful and it terrifies me." The Elder added, "I saw all of that clearly, as I was cutting out the icons, but I chose not to tell you so that I wouldn't upset you. But when you left and the lady of the house met you and you came back for coffee, I thought that God had done it so that I should tell you. And I told you." He saw my worried expression and finished up by saying, "Don't worry, however, it needs a lot of work." After my first encounter with the Elder, I said to my friends, "I heard them telling me about Christ for thirty years and I thought I knew something. However, after meeting the Elder I felt like a graduate of kindergarten." Now, following my latest meeting with him I told them, "Now, I feel like an infant, who has just applied to join the kindergarten of Christian Life."

## 4. INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

I was attracted by that life, as it was practised and preached by the Elder, and I tried to approach it. But after every revelation of his I realised how far away I actually was. Repressed traumatic experiences caused by injustices that I had suffered, from time to time, had influenced me negatively and I had no idea at all about that. I thought that I had overcome them, but a hidden resentment remained, totally invisible on the outside and therefore dangerous. It looked like a justified complaint, bitterness, and displeasure, which, for reasons of dignity remained in silence. The patristic expression, “love the sinner, but hate the sin” was perverted within me, without me knowing it, and my aversion to the sin of others was threatening to extend itself to the sinner. The Elder pointed the danger out and gave me the relevant medicine, with one simple story, as was his habit. It was a parable filled with deep meaning.

### *Feel Sorry for the Person Hurt by a Criminal*

“One day, “he started to tell me, “you are walking quietly on your way and see your brother walking in front of you, also quietly. Then at some point a bad man jumps out in front of your brother from a side road and attacks him. He beats him, pulls his hair, wounds him and throws him down bleeding. Faced with a scene like that would you be angry with your brother or would you feel sorry for him?”

I was puzzled by the Elder’s questions and I asked him in turn: “How could I possibly be angry with my wounded brother, who fell victim to the criminal? The thought didn’t even cross my mind. Of course I would feel sorry for him and I would try to help him as much as I could.”

“Well, then,” continued the Elder, “everyone who insults you, who hurts you, who slanders you, who wrongs you in any way whatsoever is a brother of yours who has fallen into the hands of some criminal demon. When you notice that your brother wrongs you. what should you do? You must feel very sorry for him.

commiserate with him and entreat God warmly and silently both, to support you in that difficult time of trial and to have mercy on your brother, who has fallen victim to the robber demon. Because if you don't do that, but get angry with him instead, reacting to his attack with a counter attack, then the devil who is already on the nape of your brother's neck will jump on to yours and dance with the both of you."

The liveliness and the directness of the example amazed me. Once again, the Elder had caught me without my "homework", whereas others considered me to be well read on matters of religion... The advice was obvious: the people who wrong me had fallen victim to the criminal devil, but I only saw the physical not the spiritual image. The result was that I got annoyed with them and the devil that was on the back of their necks also jumped on to mine, so all of us, victims and supposed victimisers would dance the demonic dance, altogether and without knowing it.

But the Elder's example could apply to all interpersonal relations. It could function like a general spiritual rule. Not a day passed by without me remembering it, since that demonic dance as either a threat or a reality, would appear before every so often. Living in an age of tension and the spread of aggression of every kind, from the height of refinement to the depths of coarseness, I felt that the Elder's message was a direct and timely wake-up call. Discernment and a prayer alarm were needed to confront evil. All my spiritually troubled friends, who heard this advice, were impressed.

### *Correction Not Condemnation of a Bad Person*

The Elder proved himself an anatomist and healer of both the human soul and human spiritual relations. He said to me in relation to this "Our aim is not to condemn evil, but to correct it. With condemnation, a man can be lost, with understanding and help he will be saved. We must treat the sinner with love and we must respect his freedom. When a member of the family knocks a vase off the table and breaks it we usually get angry. If at that crucial moment, in a movement of spiritual upliftment, we show understanding and we excuse the damage, we win both our soul and that of our brother's. That is all our spiritual life: an uplifting movement, from the annoyance that comes from egotism to the understanding that comes from love."

### *Bad Thoughts are Dangerous*

According to the Elder, this upliftment began after profound work. One day,

when surrounded by thoughts of bitterness about some people who had criticised me unjustly, the Elder rang the alarm bells regarding my aggressive, as he put it, stance. I objected, saying that I had neither said nor done anything at all against my critics; I just had negative thought, which I had not externalised and therefore I had not hurt anybody. Then the Elder revealed one more secret of the spiritual battle to me, saying, “You shouldn’t get annoyed even internally about any unjust criticism of you whatsoever.” It is bad. Evil starts from bad thoughts. When you get bitter and annoyed, even if only in thought, you ruin the spiritual atmosphere. You stop the Holy Spirit from working and you allow the devil to increase evil. You should always pray, love and forgive, rejecting each and every bad thought within you.”

That is to say, the Elder taught that our bad thoughts about one of our fellows on the one hand, defile our soul, and on the other, can do harm to the other person. A bad thought sends out an evil power, which influences the other, as prayer helps him. Of course, all this has to be understood correctly within the teaching of the Church about the existence of good and evil spirits and their work. The work of the evil ones is denigration, lying, commotion, dissension and so on, whereas for the good ones it is the service of those who are destined to inherit the Kingdom of God. A bad thought cannot be hidden. It affects the person we are thinking ugly thoughts about unfavourably towards us, even from a distance, even if the other person does not consciously realize why he is opposed to us. We are obliged to be “pure in heart”, pure not only from evil works, but from bad and evil thoughts, especially from resentment and bitterness.

### *Forgive People*

The Elder considered the last thing mentioned, forgiving whoever has harmed us, to be fundamental. He often repeated the verse of the prayer, “First be reconciled to those who grieve you.” And in confession, he paid special attention to this spiritual sin of remembering the bad things that another has done to us and holding malice, or bitterness, or animosity against him. He wanted our souls to be free from resentment, full of forgiveness and kindness.

### *Don’t Ask To Be Loved*

Another day, when I was upset because certain people did not respond to me with love, the Elder said, “Today, people ask to be loved and that is why they are disappointed. The right thing to do is not to care whether they love you or not at all, but whether they know you love Christ and other people. This is the only way in

all, but rather, whether you love Christ and other people. This is the only way in which the soul is filled.

### *Love Everybody*

The Elder's love didn't have limits; it was boundless. It extended to all of God's children, to all people, both friends and enemies. He told me: "The crown of love towards our friends contains foreign bodies (reckoning, reciprocation, vainglory, sentimental weakness, passionate liking) while the crown of love towards enemies is pure. He also said: "Our love in Christ ought to reach out everywhere, even to the hippies at Matala. I wanted to go there a lot, not to preach to them or to accuse them, but to live amongst them "without sin" and let Christ's love, which transfigures, speak for itself. I saw the hippies and I felt sorry for them. They were like "sheep without a shepherd."

On the matter of social relations, he advised me: "You shouldn't carry out your Christian struggle with sermons and debates, but with real secret love. When we contradict others they react negatively. When we love them, they are moved and we win them over. When we love, we think that we are giving to other people, but really, you are giving to yourself. Love requires sacrifice. To humbly sacrifice something that is ours, but really is God's"



## 5. HUMAN LOVE THROUGH DIVINE EROS

The Elder considered love for Christ to be a necessary pre-condition for love towards people. A love from the whole of our being, “from all our heart, soul, strength and mind,” boundless and eternal, like our beloved Christ, love which is elevated to Divine Eros<sup>[1]</sup>.

### *The Shepherd Girl’s Love and Christ’s Love*

One afternoon I was at Kallisia with the Elder, who had been informed that an abbot from an Athonite Monastery had arrived in Athens to give a talk. He said that he really wanted to breathe some Athonite air, meaning a talk by an Athonite. With a friend’s car, we went down to St. Nicholas’ on Asklipiou Street. The hall was unbearably full, mainly with students. First a theologian spoke. He developed the patristic positions on contemporary problems rather well. Then the floor was given over to the abbot, who raised the spiritual atmosphere to a height.

When he had finished, a student was inspired to ask Fr. Porphyrios a few words, after noticing him sitting in a corner, with his head bowed down. Many applauded the suggestion. Fr. Porphyrios appeared to be perturbed. He said that he did not speak at public gatherings but before the “voice of the people” he was obliged to say, with a weak voice that could just be heard: “I don’t speak, I only ask God to enlighten my disciple (meaning the abbot) to put it well.” The young people, however, were not satisfied with this, they asked to hear more.

Then Fr. Porphyrios asked: “What do you want me to tell you?” The young people answered: “How we can live the true Christian life today.” And Fr. Porphyrios started to speak slowly and carefully: “Many say that the Christian Life is disagreeable and difficult; I say that it is agreeable and easy, but it requires two pre-conditions: humility and love.” The young people, many of whom kept notes, then asked: “How can we acquire humility and love?”

Then the Elder answered with a parable. with his inimitable gift of narration:

“Children, I will tell you a story. Once there was a shepherd girl, who lived on the mountain and kept sheep. She worked hard all day to take care of her sheep, to give them water, to guard them from wild animals, to bring them back to the fold at night, to milk them and to keep them in order. When night fell and her parents were fast asleep, despite her weariness from hard work, she would jump over the wall of the fold in secret and run in the darkness, in between rocks and thorns, until she reached the mountain ridge opposite to meet the shepherd boy that she loved. And when she met him, she was very glad, despite her trouble and sacrifices, and indeed, because her meeting with her beloved had cost her so much trouble and sacrifice she was even happier. Excuse me, monk that I am, for speaking about lovers, but I’m doing it so you can understand what I want to say better. Thus, the soul ought to have her own lover, Christ, to be pleased like the shepherd girl who fell in love with the shepherd boy. And what are human love affairs compared to Divine Eros? Short-lived and illusive, whereas Divine Eros is eternal and true. The soul that is in love with Christ is always fortunate and joyful, whatever happens to her, however much hard work and sacrifice this Divine Eros takes. Indeed, the harder the soul works and the more sacrifices she makes for her beloved Christ, the happier she feels. The soul falls in love with Christ when it gets to know and to follow His commandments. When the soul is in love with Christ, she also loves people; she cannot hate them. The devil cannot enter the soul that is in love with Christ. Like in this hall, we are in now: Let’s say that we are all good. If some bad people showed up at the door at some point, and wanted to come in, they wouldn’t be able to because the hall is full of all of us. It is the same way with the soul, where all her space is taken up by Christ, the devil cannot enter and dwell there, however hard he tries, because he won’t fit, there is no room for him. That is the way we can live the true Christian life.”

The young people were enthusiastic about this simple, yet thought provoking teaching from the Elder. Some days later, I was at Kallisia again near the Elder. I said to him, amongst other things, how grateful the young people were with this teaching of his about the shepherd girl, and all the other people, who had been told the story by third parties. The Elder was pleased and said: “What do you know? Bless those kids, I don’t speak in halls, to the public, but they obliged me to. Do you know that shepherd girl came to me for confession. That’s the way it happened, just like I told you.”

“Elder,” I said, “so the story about the shepherd girl is a true one?”

“Yes, it is true.” I was impressed by how successfully the Elder had used a story from everyday life as a parable, to make his references to the eternal life comprehensible.

When the Elder talked about Divine Eros or about love in people, he had the discretion to avoid their heretical isolation. He didn't talk only about Divine Eros or only about human love, because in the first instance we would arrive at the spiritualised alienation from man and ultimately from God and in the second in the humanistic isolation from God and ultimately from man. The Elder always put forward their Orthodox synthesis. This was in the form of the horizontal and vertical cross-like dimension of love, within the body of the Church. He didn't do this by preaching and with abstraction, but dialectically and precisely, through using apt examples from the everyday life of each and every person.

### *You Are United With All the Members of the Church*

I was touched by the great love shown to me by a brother in Christ, who I had just met, through the Elder. Speaking with the Elder one day, I told him how indebted I felt to this man. Then the Elder surprised me again, asking me: "Why do you feel indebted to him? Do you think he did that for you alone?"

"Yes, Elder," I replied, "he did it just for me, selflessly- The favour he did for me cost him much hard work, time, money and travel from the provincial town where he lives, without any personal gain at all."

The Elder asked me again, "Why do you distinguish yourself? "

"How do I distinguish myself, Elder?" I asked him, "I don't understand that."

The Elder continued, "Have you never read that when one member of the body suffers all of the body suffers, and that when one member of the body is glorified all the members of the body rejoice together? Haven't you understood that if you remain as an isolated Christian, if you do not feel deep down that you are vitally united with the other members of the mystical body of Christ, i.e. with His Church, in a relationship of love, you are not a true Christian?" I understood what he said and fell silent. What could I say? That I know about what he is telling me in theory? And what is the value of theory without practice? Through his teaching, which sprang from his experience, the Elder made comprehensible the following remark that someone had once written: "It is true that unless you love other people you cannot love God. It is, however, undeniable, that only through love for God can you truly love other people."

<sup>1</sup> Eros - the strong feeling of attraction and desire between two people, characterised by a longing for union. It is an everyday term in modern Greek, but is also an image used by the Fathers to describe the intense longing and desire for Union with God. *Translator.*

## 6. PRAYER

The means by which the Elder lived out Divine Eros and human love in Christ, as a living member of His Church, was prayer. The voluntary, ceaseless, ardent, noetic prayer of Jesus. The words “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me,” was the flower of paradise that blossomed on the lips of the Elder, night and day, summer and winter. His prayer continued like his breathing both when awake and when asleep, like the biblical phrase, “I sleep yet my heart keeps vigil.”

### *Practical Teaching*

One afternoon I set off with a company of friends for Kallisia. We met a crowd of pilgrims who were waiting in the yard outside the Elder’s cell. We were the last to arrive. Night had fallen when our turn came. We saw him one by one and when we had finished the Elder accompanied us until we were outside the monastery. Despite being exhausted, he appeared to be willing. It was a beautiful summer night. The wind blew gently and a full moon had just risen above the pine-covered slopes in front of us. It was an idyllic setting, covered in silver by the pale light of the moon and transforming everything around, both dead and alive, into another world. The Elder considered it a suitable moment to tell us about prayer. He didn’t talk about theoretically, but practically. The Elder always “practised what he preached.” We were four friends altogether, including the Elder there were five of us. He placed us towards the east, two of us to his left and two to the right, with him in the middle. “Now we’ll pray noetically. First, I will say the words, and you will repeat them. But be careful, without anxiety or force, you’ll say the words calmly, humbly, with love and sweetness.” The Elder started off with his fine, delicate and eloquent voice, “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.” He said it very slowly, word by word, without forcing it at all. It was as though he had Christ before and he was begging him, with a long pause after the word “Christ”, colouring the words “have mercy on me” with an entreating tone. And we repeated it each time, trying to imitate his

stance, the colour of his voice and if it all possible his spiritual disposition. At some point, the Elder stopped saying the prayer out loud and just continued whispering it on his lips. We did the same thing. How long did our night-time prayer take? I don't remember. All I remember was that the Elder imparted an emotion to us that I cannot express with human words.

At some point, the Elder stopped that divine moment saying, "Let's stop our common prayer here. Carry it on your own. Well then, you had better be on your way back to your homes." As we walked away, I looked back and made out the Elder's silent silhouette in the moonlight, standing by the rocks with his hand held up high, blessing us.

### *You and I Are One*

Pilgrims often asked the Elder to pray for them and their loved ones and he always promised to do so. A question arose within me: "How could the Elder remember hundreds of names?" One day when we were talking about prayer he turned to me suddenly and said: "You'll probably ask how I can remember all those names in prayer? I am a weak and sinful man, I say, "Lord have mercy on George, on Nicholas, on Maria, on Catherine - as many names as I can remember- and on all those who have asked me to pray for them and whose names I have forgotten. And God, who isn't like forgetful Fr. Porphyrios, remembers all the names, at once he comes and has mercy, on all."

I admired his divine illumination and asked him, "Elder, what do you say when you pray for all those people?" The Elder answered in the most natural way, "Well, first of all I say 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.'"

"You say, 'have mercy on me'? But they asked you to pray for them, not for yourself," I retorted in amazement. And once again the Elder caught me unawares by saying, "Fine, don't you know that if God doesn't have mercy on me He won't have mercy on you either? Don't you know that you and I are one." Simple word but with great, very great depth. So much depth that in another conversation the Elder would say that this feeling of our unity hides the secret of the spiritual life in Christ.

Later, reading books about the Fathers and Saints, I saw that there, there is no greater mercy and charity to others than our own sanctification. I remembered the words of Fr. Porphyrios, when I read the biography of St. Seraphim of Sarov, who said, "Acquire the peace of God within you and thousands of people around you will be saved. "Isn't that what was also happening with Fr. Porphyrios? As for that surprising phrase, "you and I are one", I believe that it is valid, both potentially and in practice, for the Elder, who realized, with his life, the prayer of

Christ, “that all may be one”. As regards myself, I believe that it is only valid as a capability, due to the sacrifice of Christ and the holiness of the Elder.

### *Night-Time Prayer Is A Great Help*

On a visit to the Elder, I remembered a quote from one of St. John Chrysostom’s homilies, and I mentioned it to him. “Just as the night-time prayer of Paul and Silas opened the gates of the prison - so the night-time prayer of Christians opens the gates to heaven.” The Elder was enthusiastic as soon as he heard it. “That’s beautiful,” he said happily, “where did you find it? Copy it out for me and bring me the whole thing. You know, it’s just like that. What St. John Chrysostom says, happens with night time prayers and vigils. When you wake up at night, don’t turn over and go back to sleep. Get up, kneel before the Crucifix and the Saints and pray humbly with love. Half an hour, fifteen minutes, ten minutes, five... however long you can. You’ll find great help. You should go to vigils too.”

The Elder did not tell me anything in relation to himself, but as I learnt from those around him, although he had not read the relevant homily of St. John Chrysostom, he put it into practice, every night. Besides that, the Elder, following an agreement with many of his spiritual children, had created a wide circle of people who shared in prayer at the same fixed time each evening. This unity of prayer between the Elder and his children unites them all secretly with Christ and amongst themselves and it helped them in their lives a great deal.

### *Vision for a Duty Hospital-Monastery*

One evening, at Kallisia, the Elder asked me, “Tell me, when someone is sick do they check what time it is before they go to the hospital?” I was puzzled by his unusual question and answered, “Why should they check the time, Elder? If they are really sick, they’ll go to the hospital straightaway, whatever time it is.” The Elder said, “Even during the night? Even after midnight?”

“Certainly,” I said. Then he continued, “And tell me, do you think a person is in any less danger when he falls ill from spiritual sickness, from sins?”

“They are in incomparably more danger,” I answered.

“Do you know,” he continued, “how many people are in danger of losing both this fleeting life and eternal life because of their sins? How many fall into despair and are on the verge of suicide? If that happens to them at, say, two in the morning and they want to find a Church that is open at that time so that they can pray, with a spiritual father to give them confession, would they be able to?”

"No, of course not," I replied, with my curiosity now aroused about what the Elder finally wanted to tell me. "Well, then," he summed up, "wouldn't it be great if there was a monastery outside of Athens, but not far from Athens, where services and confessions would take place in the Church all around the clock, 24 hours a day, with shifts of hieromonks, like the doctors at duty hospitals and people wounded by sin could seek refuge there, whatever time of day or night?" Now I understood what he meant. It would be great if there was one, I answered, but there isn't. The Elder nodded his head sadly and smiled strangely. His vision seemed to be a very bold, Utopian even.

### *The Vision Begins to be Realised*

Years had passed by since then. Our meetings continued as usual. I knew vaguely that the Elder was looking for a plot of land outside Athens. When, one day I learnt from a spiritual child of his that the Elder had finally bought a plot near Milessi, Oropos, and had settled there living in a mobile-home. I visited him at his new residence, at the first opportunity, together with a friend. He received us with great joy and spoke to us with much love about the Monastery of the Transfiguration of the Saviour that would be built. Since night had fallen, he led us through the forest to an opening where we could see the lights of Evia and Oropos shining. Then the Elder became excited, he stretched both his arms out towards Athens and said, "How wonderful! We will build a monastery here, and people will come to seek comfort in our prayers!"

At that moment I remembered what the Elder had said in our other night-time conversation, years before, at Kallisia, where he had explained his "Utopia" to me. How far ahead the Elder saw, with his gift of foresight, which sprang from his unceasing prayers to Christ and how short-sighted I was, with my poor reasoning. As, with time, the Elder moved in turn from the mobile-home to a brick-built cell and from there to the cell of the main building, which rose up, slowly yet surely, I realised that the Elder had revealed future realities to me during that evening at Kallisia. Future realities that for God and His Saints are within the present.

One day, in his brick cell, in a moment of spiritual exaltation, he spoke to me in hushed tone about his great love, the Catholicon or main church of the monastery, which would be built in the future: "It will be a beautiful church. Have you been to the draught-shop to see the lovely plans the lady engineers have made? Go and see them. We are going to make underground chapels that will be lit with hidden lighting. Athonite fathers, who are advanced in spiritual life, will come there to live ascetically and to teach the prayer of the nous. This will be really important, because the Jesus Prayer includes all the prayers and

will be really important, because the Jesus Prayer includes all the prayers and works miracles.”

The Elder concentrated all this secret effort for the monastery in prayer. Through prayer, he conceived of the vision of the monastery and through prayer he collected money, raised the building and laid the foundations of the Church. All this had one goal: The ascetic practice of noetic prayer in the highest and broadest scale possible. The monastery would function, in Christ, for the world and the world for the monastery. He once said to me: “Orthodox asceticism isn’t just for monasteries, but for the world too. Prayer in church, long services and glorification of God in a spirit of love are a great blessing. If you only knew how much souls suffer from the passions and how much rest they find with Christ’s love. It would be more pleasurable for me to withdraw to the Holy Mountain, to the skete of my repentance and to glorify God there in the desert.”

### *I Help You More with My Prayers*

At the beginning of our relationship, I was anxious and impatient about how to see the Elder to ask him things and to get his answers. I felt spiritually empty when he was absent from Kallisia or when he was there but did not receive people because he was sick, or just gave a silent blessing. The Elder gradually freed me from that anxiety. One day he said to me: “You know, I think I help you a lot with my prayers.”

“I’m glad to hear you say that yourself, because I feel that too.” I told him, “I thank you very much and I beg you, please do not stop praying for me. I confess that I always ask for Christ’s help, through your prayers, especially in trying moments, and I am always strengthened - I feel it deeply. The Elder shined with joy and said: “What’s that you say? You, you do that? I also feel the same thing.”

Another day he revealed to me: “Do you know what I see? That I help you more with my prayers than with my words. I always remember you in my prayers. Pray for me, the sinner, too.” Those words were the shot in the arm that I needed to relieve my anxiety and unease about seeing him and talking with him. “Thank you very much, Elder.” I said to him, “Now you have freed me from a nightmare, which tired me all the more, because I tired you. Now, when I am unable to see you and hear you, I won’t be upset anymore. It is enough that you pray for me and so I will get the greatest possible help from Christ. As regards my own prayer for you “the sinner”, as you said, what can I say for my sinfulness and how could I, wretch that I am, dare pray for you?” The Elder replied with a smile: “You’ll pray, you’ll pray for me too, God listens to us repentant sinners a lot.”



## *Greetings and Prayer*

From a certain point onwards, I started to realise the prominent place that prayer took throughout the Elder's whole life. From then on, each time that I met him, I did not speak to him straightaway, but after saying "Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers" in order to enter, I venerated the large icon of the Theotokos that he had in his cell, then I knelt before him, kissed his hand, touching it with my forehead and silently prayed in this way. The Elder noticed this immediately and prayed with manifest pleasure. This common prayer would last for an undetermined amount of time, and then the Elder would start to speak. I observed that his most important revelations to me occurred after our silent common prayer.

It was obvious that during those sacred moments of silence, God talked to him directly and the Elder translated the words of God into human words.

## *Don't Get Tired of Praying*

The Elder advised me to face all my problems with prayer until they were solved. He said to me: "Pray without anxiety, calmly, with faith in God's love and Providence. Don't get tired of praying.

He asked me to pray for him and for God to give him patience with his sicknesses, which made him suffer a great deal.

## *Prayer's Spiritual Embrace*

Each time that the Elder spoke about prayer, I realised that he was not talking about a superficial and random attempt, but a deep and continuous one. Once, when handling the problem of a certain mother's child: A lady, was known to both the Elder, and me and had asked me to ask him about it. The Elder said to me: "The child has an inner problem and that is why he behaves the way he does. The child is good, he doesn't want to do what he does, but he is forced, he is tied up by something. It cannot be fixed with reasoning, you cannot convince him with advice, nor can you force him with threats. That will have the opposite effect. He could get worse, he could stay that way, or he may be freed from it. His mother must become holy so that he can escape. To be freed he needs a holy person next to him, who won't preach to him, or frighten him, but will live with holiness. The child will see this and will be jealous and will want to imitate it. Above all the child needs to be near a person of warm and plentiful prayer.

Prayer works miracles. A mother should not be satisfied with giving her child a real hug; she should try this ascesis, the spiritual embrace of prayer. When she goes to show affection to the child without prayer, the child does this (he stretches out his hands and pushes the mother away). However, when she prays in secret with fervent prayer, without embracing him or showing affection, he will feel something unexplainable in his soul a spiritual embrace that will attract him to his mother. When a mother prays for her children, she must melt like a candle. She should pray silently and with her hands raised high towards Christ, to embrace her child in secret. Then the same thing that happened to Maria, Dimitri and George will happen.

“What happened to Maria, Dimitri and George, Elder?” I asked. The Elder replied, “Haven’t I told you that story? Well, then I’ll tell you it.”

### *The Story of Maria, Dimitri and George*

Dimitri and Maria were brother and sister. Dimitri had a friend called George, a doctor. George would visit Dimitri at home. After a while Maria revealed a secret to her brother. She had fallen deeply in love with George and she was suffering. Her heart ached, her hands and feet trembled and she sweated all over, each time she saw him. She begged her brother not to bring George home anymore, so she wouldn’t have to suffer in vain. This was because George’s family was rich and had a higher social status and they would never accept poor and insignificant Maria as a daughter-in-law. From then on Dimitri avoided inviting George into the house, making up different excuses to see him in the garden. One day, Maria visited me. She opened her heart up to me, she told me of how it ached. I advised her to pray fervently, especially at dawn, in the darkness before day breaks, raising her hands up towards God and asking for His Will to be done. Maria followed my advice. It wasn’t long before George complained to Dimitri, because he had changed his stance towards him without explanation, saying that he avoided him and never took him into the house anymore. Dimitri then told him the reason why, putting his sister’s problem to him. George then burst into tears and confessed that he too had the same problem, that he loved Maria very much and for a long time now he had woken up just before daybreak with the vision of Maria before his eyes. Maria prayed, as I advised her during this hour. Thus, with fervent prayer, the secret feelings of the two good young people were revealed and they finally got married, despite the initial objections from George’s parents.

The mother of the child we were talking about needs such prayer. Prayer that is warm, enduring and persistent and God will work his miracle and free the

child from whatever is tying him up. The child will find the right path through the holiness of his mother.”

### *Prayer is Always Good for Us*

The Elder recommended prayer as the most successful answer to all our problems. Someone complained that he suffered from persistent insomnia. And the Elder showed him the right medicine: Prayer. He followed this prescription and was finally cured from his insomnia and at the same time, he achieved something much higher: he learnt to pray about all his problems.

During one of our meetings he said to me: “Why did God advise us to pray without ceasing? Is it because he perhaps wants us to “sit up and beg” before him? No, God does not want that. God wants us to benefit. He knows that when we glorify him, with our free will, like the angels, continually, day and night, our soul is truly given rest because our true interests lie there.”

### *We Should Ask to be Worthy of God’s Love*

I once asked him “What is the best thing to say in my prayers?” He answered, “Nothing. God knows what you need most better than you do. Continually say the Jesus Prayer.”

Another time, having forgotten that answer of his, I asked him the same thing again. And the Elder said to me, “You should beg God to make you worthy of His love.” I realised that, with those two short answers of his, he gave me some valuable messages: It is enough for me to pray continually, without worrying about what I should say in my prayer. The Jesus Prayer is enough. God does not need to be informed by me, about my needs, because he knows them incomparably better than I do and sees to their satisfaction, because he loves me. My problem is not informing God, to ask for an expression of His Love, which is, in any case, given. My problem is getting my own love to correspond with God’s love, so that our love becomes two-way and so that all my problems are solved in this way. The problem is not with the transmitter but with the receiver. In order to fully return Christ’s love, the receiver must follow His saying: “He who has my commandments and keeps them, is he that loves me.” He once said to me, “Always pray to God. All good things come from God: the desire for prayer and love and humility, and confession and every good thing. Every time that within your soul you feel like confessing, go to your spiritual father, it is very good.” From his words, I reached the conclusion that: I must expect everything good, both for me and for others, from God alone through prayer. He added: “In your prayer ask God to do His Will for you. That is what is in your

added. "In your prayer ask God to do this will for you. That is what is in your interest the most."

### *Make Prostrations*

He recommended kneeling bows during prayer, according to strength. "Make as many prostrations as you can during prayer; even if this tires you. When prayer is accompanied by voluntary sacrifice, it becomes even more pleasing to God and more effective."

### *Help Them with Your Prayer*

Once I wanted to help some people, with a serious problem of theirs, which the Elder had pointed out, but they were unaware of it. I perceived that there was a danger that they would not understand me. They might misinterpret me, so that instead of giving spiritual benefit it would give spiritual harm. I told the Elder of these thoughts and he said: "Don't confront them about that problem. They will certainly misunderstand you, blame you and make your life hell. But do not be indifferent towards them. Help them from a distance with your prayer. In that way you'll avoid doing them spiritual damage and they'll receive greater benefit through your prayer." I followed the discerning Elder's advice and that put my mind at ease.

### *Prayer While Working*

An exceptional impression was made on me by the fact that the Elder dedicated his time either to praying exclusively or to praying while working. I saw him talking to me, making phone calls, eating, drinking water, lighting the stove, doing all his various chores and I realised that he prayed at the same time. He himself was the first to apply what he taught others about prayer.

He said to me one day, "There is an electricity generator somewhere, and in this room there is a light bulb.

But if we don't turn on the switch, we will remain in darkness. There is Christ and there is our soul. But if we don't turn on the prayer switch our soul will not see the light of Christ and it will remain in the darkness of the devil." It was very clear that the soul of the Elder was illuminated by the light of Christ, both day and night, because his prayer kept the generator in constant spiritual contact with the light bulb."

## Publisher's Supplement I: Teachings of Elder Porphyrios about Noetic Prayer of the Heart

Above, the writer says that the Elder told him to “say the Jesus Prayer continually”. Therefore, we believe that a wider explanation of the Elder’s teaching on noetic prayer would be useful at this point.

According to the Elder’s teaching, a presupposition for practising noetic prayer is, first, an experienced Elder who will guide the person practising the prayer and secondly, a soul purified from evil, remembrance of wrongs, dislikes, wilfulness, vanity, and the like. He very much stressed the need for the celebration of the given services and the reading of the hymns of our Church. Therefore, his advice to the writer also holds for all of us, but with discernment; without doing away with the services and without the idea that because we say “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.” we have supposedly reached some measure.

Indeed, the Elder saw that some people wanted to “learn” to say the prayer of the heart from egotism, so that they could boast - either openly or in secret- that they practised a higher form of prayer. When this was the case, he advised them not to occupy themselves with noetic prayer. He had given examples of people who had suffered because they undertook the prayer of the heart with a “program”, or “aim”, or “method”, instead of humbly calling on God to save them. Prayer is not counted out; it bounces. The person praying does not observe it, but it overflows like tears of emotion, without a deliberate effort. Nevertheless, a certain amount of work is required for prayer, but not forced or compelled. We must create the right atmosphere. We should read something spiritual, we should burn incense, chant hymns, light up our little oil lamp, we should concentrate, we should give thanks and glorification, we should give supplication and all this simply without force, “in simplicity of heart” (Wisdom of Solomon 1:1). Since distorted thoughts, that we are practising a higher form, separate us from God, and when God is tried by the foolish (who want to measure their prayer) he reproaches them.

It is obvious from what the author writes above, at the beginning of this chapter, in the section entitled “practical teaching”, that the Elder had seen him praying the Jesus Prayer. Without given him any particular explanation, in order to avoid giving him tempting thoughts the Elder realised that he could say it in

“simplicity of heart”. This is why he recommended that he just say it. Indeed, he would have said the same thing to all Christians, with the exception of those who want to “learn” the “secrets” of noetic prayer in order to sell knowledge and to boast. No prayer will save those people. So, let us keep this conclusion, we can all pray “Lord Jesus Christ have mercy upon me”, if we do not think about it, we do not discuss it, but we say it to Christ alone, “calmly, humbly, with love and sweetness”, without measuring it and without forgetting the other established prayers of our Church, as much as we can.

### *The Monk Paisios Guidance about the Jesus Prayer*

We also think that it would be good to add a relevant text by the blessed and very well-known monk Paisios, the Athonite, who recently slept in the Lord (12/7/1994). He wrote this text c. 1975, as a letter to someone, who had asked him about it. He gave it to a visitor to post in an open envelope and gave him permission to read it and to keep a copy. This visitor gave it to us and we hope that Elder Paisios will no longer have an objection to us publishing it for the spiritual benefit of many and as proof that experienced Elders agree that the prayer of the heart is not subject to measurement and subjugation.

We present the text as given:

*“Guidance about the Jesus Prayer,*

*A simple way for ceaseless prayer, if you want to you can use it too, which probably helps simple people who cannot get the true meaning of the neptic Holy Fathers, and run the risk of delusion.*

*Some (unfortunately) do not set the goal of putting off the old man (repentance, humility, and asceticism as a way of helping the sanctification of the soul) with a deep sense of their sinfulness. Then, they would naturally feel the need for God’s mercy, saying “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me,” often. This with pain in their heart and then the feeling of the sweetness of divine comfort of the most Sweet Christ within their heart.*

*But unfortunately some people (as I mentioned) start off with a dry ascetic practice and seek after divine pleasure and lights and continually multiply their prayer-ropes and are sanctified by their calculation, reaching that conclusion (about their sanctity) from the mathematical reckoning of the greater amount of prayer-ropes they say.*

*They also (naturally) make footstools to the exact inch and all the other things, the bending of the head towards the heart. They regulate their breath and whatever else the watchful Saint Kallistuses and Gregorys of the Philokalia say.*

*Then they create the false sensation that they are somewhere near the measure of those Saints.*

*From the moment they believe that thought, the tangalaki<sup>[1]</sup> (the demon) immediately appears and sets up a television for them (with their fantasies) and devilish prophecies etc. of delusion follow.*

*For this reason, the only certainty is repentance and let every spiritual edifice be built upon it and let us continually seek repentance from God and nothing else except that.*

*We should not ask for lights or miracles, or prophecies, or gifts of the Spirit, only for repentance. Repentance brings humility; humility will bring grace from God, because grace always goes to the humble, of necessity. Therefore, repentance is necessary for our salvation and when we have it, the grace of God will come and it will teach us what we need to do for salvation even of our fellows too, if it is necessary.*

*In this way, which I mentioned (feeling the great need for God's mercy), we will say the Jesus Prayer many times with our whole heart and we will feel, as I mentioned, the sweetness of divine comfort of the most sweet Jesus within our heart. The heart will (then) have our nous in tight embrace, as well as our whole being.*

*Then, and only then, will prayer not be tiring, but rather it will give rest, because we have grasped the true meaning of it. Only then do we pray without putting pressure on ourselves, but we are pressurised by our sense of honour and dignity [philotimo]<sup>[2]</sup>, which gives rise to all our spiritual upstanding generosity [leventia]<sup>[3]</sup>. This produces the fluttering of the heart. Then the heart (however stony it may be) breaks and tears burst forth from their ducts (without an effort being made to weep during the time of prayer).*

*You feel the need for this prayer like a hungry baby who opens its little mouth and runs into the arms of its mother to be suckled and at the same time feels very secure in its mother's loving care.*

*Nobody doubts that the enemy will try to war against us and to disperse our thoughts. However, when preceded by a little bit of Patristic study (e.g. The Sayings of the Fathers) a lid is put on all our cares, great and small, and on the day's temptations. So, it is transformed into another atmosphere, a spiritual one and you pray with concentration.*

*If the enemy wages war with blasphemous thoughts (from his usual wickedness and envy) do not get upset. Instead, use the demon as your worker in the following way, by not getting upset, but by saying to the enemy: "It's a good thing that you brought me those thoughts so that I can say the Jesus Prayer, because otherwise I forget to pray without ceasing." The enemy will then depart*

*immediately, because he is only used to doing evil. I mentioned that because the enemy brings blasphemous thoughts to sensitive people (usually) to make them even more sensitive, to upset them and to cut them down.*

*The same applies to some that struggle in vigil over and above their strength, and with pride. When they slacken, and they do not have the strength to banish the thoughts of the enemy. They think that those blasphemous thoughts are their own, and so they suffer without reason, while the thoughts are not their own, but those of the enemy.*

*That is why young people should struggle in the matter of prayer with humility and discernment. They should prepare for the night (from the day). This, by not being distracted, by study and through moderate and simple food, which helps. As far as possible it should not be savoury, to avoid drinking plenty of water, because that, too, is an obstacle, with the bloating that it causes. In this way, the person is helped with prayer.*

*It helps a great deal if the light evening meal, however light it may be, takes place at around 4 o'clock (European time), after study, fathers and so on, or else 3 hours after the main meal. Small and great prostrations beforehand, and in between each prayer-rope, help a great deal, unfreezing the machine's oil. Later, after getting quite tired, he should sit down and say the Jesus Prayer, since he brings to mind his wretchedness and the great favours of God that our good God has done for him.*

*Then the nous is collected (as I mentioned, in the heart, on its own) and seeks God's mercy with all his heart, with all his soul and with all his mind, without making a great effort.*

*The three hours after sunset help a lot (having read patristic books before sunset), as well as after midnight until sunrise. For young people it is good for them to sleep one hour after sunset, with less prayer, and to get up after midnight, in order to avoid scandalous sleep of the morning.*

*Naturally, discernment is required and guidance from their spiritual father, who is a requirement."*

End of supplement.

<sup>[1]</sup> This was the Elder Paisios's own peculiar expression. It is perhaps Turkish in origin (the Elder came from Asia Minor) from a word meaning a trickster, con-artist or equivocator. Another interpretation is that it is from the Greek word for a rancid stink. *Translator.*

<sup>[2]</sup> Elder Paisios was absolutely correct when he once said that "Greeks may have a pile of faults, but they also have a gift from God, *philotimo* and *leventia*; they celebrate everything. Other peoples do not even have these words in their dictionaries." These two expressions are almost untranslatable in English.



*Philotimo*, according to Elder Paisios, means “the reverent distillation of goodness; the radiant love of the humble man bereft of himself, but with a heart full of gratitude to God and his fellow man; because of his spiritual sensitivity he tries to repay even the slightest good that others do to him.” *Leventia* means courage, honesty, generosity of heart, directness, manliness and in general the willingness to lay down one’s life for others. *Translator*.

<sup>[3]</sup> See above. *Translator*.

## 7. LOVE AND VIOLENCE

I was always concerned about the thorny question of love and violence. On the one hand, love as lived and taught by Christ and every sanctified follower of his, and on the other, the many forms of violence between citizens or states.

### *The Robber who Became a Monk and Beat the Robbers with Violence*

I asked the Elder what his opinion was on the matter. He answered: “The things are confused”. He went on to tell this parable:

“Once there was a monastery on a mountain, where the monks lived in peace. One day it was raided by robbers, they went fiercely into the monastery church and their leader asked for the Abbot. A monk informed him. He was in the sanctuary at the time, and asked the chief- robber to wait a little while until he had finished doing something. He knelt in front of the Holy Altar and started a fervent prayer to Christ, to free them from the danger. During that time, the chief-robber looked at the church wall-paintings with curiosity. Fierce as he was, his attention was caught by an icon of the Final Judgement and especially the terrible fire-breathing dragon that consumed the damned. At that moment, the Abbot came out of the sanctuary. As soon as the chief-robber saw him he said rudely and abruptly, “You’ll give me all the monastery’s treasures at once, otherwise we’ll slaughter you. But first I want you to tell me what this picture represents.” The Abbot, who continued to pray secretly, explained that on one side is Christ, who takes the righteous with him to Paradise and on the other the devil- demon, who consumes all the sinners in the furnace of Hell. “Who are those sinners?” the chief-robber asked. The Abbot replied, “Those who steal, who kill, who swear, who dishonour, who do every bad thing.”

“You mean to say, that I’ll also go to Hell?”

“By the look of things, “said the Abbot, “that is where you’re headed.”

“Isn’t there a way I can avoid Hell?” he asked.

“There is.” the Abbot replied.

“And what is it?”

“If you repent for all your sins, confess, take communion and struggle to avoid evil and to do good.”

“Where can I do that?”

“Here, in the monastery.”

Then the chief-robber turned suddenly to the robbers who followed him and said, “I will stay here.” The robbers left and the chief confessed to the Abbot, who made him a novice. He gave him a rule not to do anything without first asking an old monk, who he would work with.

One day the Abbot sent the two monks to chop wood from the mountain and bring it back to the monastery for the winter. They set off with their donkey, they reached the mountain, they chopped down the wood, loaded it up, but before they managed to set off robbers appeared before them. They took the donkey with the wood and beat up the monks. The chief-robber monk was enraged, but before he made any move whatsoever, he asked his companion: “What do the books say we should do now?” His companion replied, “Nothing, Christ’s law says that if someone slaps your face, you should turn the other cheek.” The robbers left with the stolen goods. The monks also left empty-handed and beaten. When the Abbot saw then he felt sorry, but he didn’t say anything. A few days later he sent them to the mountain again, with another donkey, but more-or-less the same thing happened again. The Abbot was very thoughtful; he didn’t know what to do. But, since it was very cold, with a great deal of effort, he found a third beast, and sent them to the mountain yet again. At the very moment when they were getting ready to leave the same robbers turned up again, they took the donkey and again they started to beat them up. The chief-robber monk’s indignation came to a head. However, he again asked his companion, “Quickly, Elder, find out what the Scriptures tell us to do.” His companion again said to him, “Nothing, the law of Christ says patience and love towards enemies.” The chief-robber monk was not satisfied and said to him, “Think hard, aren’t there any other scriptures that say something else?” His companion answered, “Well, there’s also the Old Testament, with the Law of Moses.”

“And what does that law say?”

“It says an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.”

“That’s a good law.” said the chief-robber monk and landed a punch on One of the robbers, knocking him flat out. The other robbers looked at him in surprise. Then he ripped open his robes and showed them his very hairy chest. “Do you know who I am?” he said to the terrified robbers. “I am so-and-so the famous chief-robber, who became a monk. If you don’t want me to make

mincemeat out of the lot of you, you had better leave us the loaded donkey and get cracking to bring us back, the other two donkeys, which you stole, and make sure they're loaded with wood" The robbers complied with his order. So, the two monks returned triumphantly to the monastery, with three loaded donkeys. As soon as the Abbot saw them, he started crossing himself and glorifying Christ. Then the chief-robber monk said to him, "Don't glorify Christ, holy father, but glorify Moses. We brought back all the stolen goods with the law of Moses, because if we had kept to Christ's law we would have returned both thrashed and empty handed."

### *The Simple Monk who Beat the Robbers with Prayer*

The Elder's story, narrated with an unrivalled grace, made an impression on me and I tried to interpret it, when he started to tell me a second one:

"There was a monastery where all the monks had grown old and died, except for one, who lived there like a hermit. This monk was completely illiterate, but he had a strong and simple faith. As he did the services and his work, he believed that Christ and his saints were alive and that they kept him company. That's why he spoke to them regularly, just like he was speaking to living people.

One day, when he was away from the monastery, robbers came and stole whatever they found. They loaded up their horses and left. When the monk returned and saw the monastery stripped bare he got upset. He immediately ran to the Church, dedicated to St. Nicholas, he stood before the patron saint of the monastery and said, "My dear Saint Nicholas, what happened here when I left? Bad men came and robbed the monastery and you just looked at them and didn't say anything. What did you do to stop the thieves? I see that you didn't do anything. Well then, you're not worthy of the position you've got, because you didn't guard the monastery. I'll take you down from there." And he immediately removed the icon of the Saint from the icon-screen, he put it outside the monastery, leaning it on a rock, he went back inside and locked the door. Before the hour had passed, a loud knocking was heard at the main door. He opened it and what should he see: The robbers with their horses loaded up with all the stolen goods saying to him, "We stole from the monastery and, as we left, our horses went along normally, but at some point they stopped and they wouldn't go forward. We beat them, we pulled them, and they stood still. But, as soon as we turned back, they ran. We said to ourselves that it seems like God wanted the stolen goods back, so we brought you them." The monk took his things and, as the robbers left, he thanked God. Then he remembered the saint's icon. He went

to the rock where he had left it, he venerated it and said: “Now I recognise your position, Saint Nicholas. You are the patron and protector of the monastery.” He triumphantly picked up the icon of the Saint and he put it in its place.”

Combining these two stories in my head I came to the following conclusion. The Elder wanted to tell me that the practice of love and non-violence towards enemies presupposes holiness, like the Abbot in the first story or the simple monk in the second; whereas, for the chief-robber monk, resorting to Mosaic Law was a necessary evil.

### *Defence Against a Guard-Dog with Stones or with Prayer?*

One summer evening, I was returning with two friends on foot, following a spiritual banquet with the Elder at Kallisia. We had been influenced by the Elder’s words and by all that we had read in the lives of saints, who had reached such heights of holiness, so that they were not even disturbed by wild beasts. On the contrary the beasts were obedient to the saints and served them. I had told them the two stories with the Abbot and the simple monk, who tamed human “beasts”, the robbers with their prayer and their unshakable faith. As we walked, the loud barking of a guard-dog, from the other side of the hill, broke the nocturnal silence of the forest. Little by little the barking gradually became louder. I then had a bright idea. I turned to my friends and suggested that we face the dog with prayer. They agreed. We said the Jesus Prayer together and continued. But, the dog just kept coming towards us threateningly. At some moment, I realised that he had approached us so much that we were in immediate danger of being bitten. We looked at each other and instinctively bent down. We picked up whatever stones we could and threw them at the guard-dog. The dog, encouraged by the freedom to attack, which we had allowed him, was suddenly taken aback by our counter-attack and stopped his advance and followed us barking from a safe distance, until he went away and left us in peace.

I then said to my friends that we do not take after the Abbot or the simple monk, but the robber monk who took refuge in the Law of Moses. Most probably, Fr.

Porphyrrios had helped us from afar, with his secret prayer, in realizing how necessary discernment is, so that we attempt to do things only according to our spiritual measure. Facing the guard-dog with prayer was beyond our measure, which was very small, due to our spiritual indolence. Who knows what temptations of arrogance and pride we would have fallen into if our prayer was heard. Also, how dangerous it was to believe that asking for those things from

God would be blessed, when He has given us the ability to do it ourselves.

## 8. GIFT OF CLAIRVOYANCE AND FORESIGHT<sup>[1]</sup>

From childhood, the Elder offered his whole self to God, with love and joy, as a “living sacrifice” and God, in turn, gave him miraculous gifts from early on.

### *What the Clairvoyant See?*

One of those gifts was clairvoyance<sup>[2]</sup>, or spiritual perceptiveness. With this he could break away from the narrow natural human confines of time and space. His spiritual senses were sharpened and they supplanted his limited natural senses. He had the facility to see what could not be naturally seen and to hear what could not be naturally heard. He saw, in people and things, the deep cause of events, so that he could interpret them correctly, without being influenced by appearances, which usually deceive. He had overcome time’s natural division into past, present and future and space’s division into here and there. He experienced, by Grace, time’s unification into an eternal present and space’s unification into an infinite here. So it was not surprising that the Elder saw the darkest depths of the soul and events that have happened, are happening and will happen within a continual present, not only here, but everywhere else too. Certainly for us, these miracles could not be explained by reason, since we were not at the Elder’s spiritual level. Therefore, we did not understand him but he understood us. The Elder lived and experienced the age to come from the here and now, by the grace of God, Who rewarded his loving self-sacrifice towards Him; whereas we live in the present age.

### *Prediction, Yet Silent Until the Time is Right*

I got my first taste of his gift when I had my first meeting with him, where I found out that the Elder already knew my past and my present. He also knew my future. Something which I was certainly unaware of and which he did not reveal to me for pastoral reasons. The way he used his energies with regard to my

future seemed somewhat strange to me. Since, although he started off in one particular direction, which I accepted with satisfaction, later, under the determining influence of newer facts and events, he changed course and went in the opposite direction; something which I finally accepted with even greater satisfaction. But he made me wonder: Why, having set off in one direction, did we end up in another? Was it perhaps because the Elder did not know about the future change? However, he solved my bewilderment one day, ten years after our first encounter, by saying: “You know, I saw that result from the first moment that I saw you, but it wouldn’t have been right to reveal it to you then, because your soul was not ready to accept it. I’m telling you now... now that God has prepared you through the events that he has allowed to happen in the meanwhile.

### *Have They Passed Away?*

Once, I composed a list of living and dead relatives. When I arrived at the Elder’s, I asked him to pray for the repose of the departed souls. I started to read the names to him, and he crossed himself and prayed. Suddenly he stopped praying and asked, loudly: “Have those people whose names you’re reading now, passed away?” What had happened? In my rush, I had finished reading the names of the departed and carried on with the names of the living, but I had forgotten to mention it. However, the Elder “saw” it immediately with his spiritual eyes and started to say the prayer for the living.

### *The Baby-Name*

On another visit, I was very sad. The Elder trying to comfort me, using the nickname my mother used for me when I was a very small child. It was a very unusual baby-name and I had forgotten it almost completely. The Elder transported me back decades in the past and I heard my late and blessed mother talking to me with loving care.

### *She Will Call You*

A female acquaintance of mine, whose child was seriously ill, asked me to drive her to see the Elder. Several months of silence on the part of the lady then passed. I asked the Elder if I was obliged, for her child’s sake, to telephone her in regard to this. The Elder objected strongly: “Do not phone her at all. It isn’t right. The right thing is for her to want to come. But don’t worry, she’ll call you



very soon.” She called three days later. She was taken aback when I told her that I was expecting her phone call around then. When I told her about my conversation with the Elder her amazement grew. We visited, and from that day on the lady became one of his regular visitors.

### *A Prayer Answered*

One day, the same lady had a great need to see the Elder and asked me to accompany her. We arrived at the monastery very early in the morning, in order to get ahead in the queue. A lot of people were waiting outside the Elder’s cell, but he was away on business in Oropos. We waited until midday and finally started to return, having achieved nothing. As we walked on the tarmac, in the direction of Athens, towards the stop for the long-distance bus, I turned to the despairing lady and said that we should pray to God in order to see the Elder. She took it ironically, because even if the Elder were to return at that moment he would not see us on the road that we were walking along. Despite that, we prayed since I told her that the Elder picks things up with his spiritual radar and could turn up even when we do not expect him. At a certain point, we suddenly saw a car opposite us, coming from the direction of Athens at great speed. I only just managed to catch sight of the Elder inside it and shouted with joy, “Look, it’s Fr. Porphyrios.” The lady did not see him, but she was impressed by his unexpected appearance. I suggested that we go back to the monastery. She was hesitant, because she reasoned that even if he started receiving visitors in his cell, so many had gathered outside that we would not even see him by midnight, since we had lost our place in the queue. I told her that we should put more effort into our prayer. After performing one miracle, God could always do another. So, we headed back for the monastery. Just as we reached the foot of the hill, we saw a car parked by the dirt road and further on, in a field, the Elder was picking tomatoes. The lady shyly approached him and had a relaxed conversation with him, right there in the field. She was comforted. I also saw him for a short-while. Afterwards, he got into the car and went to the monastery where a crowd of people was waiting for him. The lady was overjoyed and could not reasonably explain what had happened. She thought she was dreaming.

### *Advice Confirmed by Clairvoyance*

An exceptional friend of mine, who had never come to my house, decided to finally come and pay me a visit.

He came. We talked about various things of common interest and he helped me with the household chores. I met the Elder a few days later and as we were

me with the household chores. I met the Elder a few days later and as we were discussing a personal problem of mine and he suggested a solution, which I saw as nearly impossible, he suddenly said to me: "Your friend such-and-such visited you at home, and helped you, eh?" Surprised, I asked him "Did my friend come and tell you?" And the Elder replied, quite naturally, "No, he didn't come." My surprise was turned into silent amazement. I did not ask the justified question, "Since my friend didn't come to you, where did you find out about it?" I had already started to realize, by being near him, that "where God's will is done, the order of nature is overcome."

His surprising "vision" about my friend's visit was an overture towards seeing that the solution the Elder suggested could actually be achieved. That is to say, that this was confirmation for me that, just as he saw my friend's visit, he also saw the feasibility of the solution.

### *I Saw You, I See...*

One year I spent Easter at a monastery. Later, the Elder said to me, quite simply: "I saw you at the monastery during Pascha and, indeed, you were pleased to be there." A young lady student, who had left the city, heard the same thing. "I saw you by the sea during the summer, where you read your patristic books."

On a visit to the Elder's brick cell, he decided that he should keep me in conversation for a very long time. At some moment, he stopped and he said to me, "I've kept you for a long while. Now the ladies waiting outside have become annoyed with you, they are talking at your expense, saying that you only care about yourself and are indifferent to everyone waiting outside. They are also talking at my expense, saying that I make exceptions."

When I left, I was met with grim expressions. A lady I knew, who was also waiting, told me confidentially what the ladies had been saying about me and the Elder. They were the exact words that the Elder had mentioned. Without showing that I was twice informed about what they had said, I said that I was slow to leave because the Elder had a reason for keeping me back - something that could happen to any one of them. They then calmed down.

### *The Cross in Front of the Monastery*

An abbot of a monastery, which was 500 km away, visited him. The Elder described the monastery in detail, although he had never been there. Indeed, he "saw" a large cross and behind it a hidden cave. The abbot, whom I knew, told all this to me. It happened that I would later visit the monastery and see with my

physical eyes, all that the Elder saw with his spiritual eyes. When I went to the Elder and told him about my visit to that monastery he was very pleased and asked me: “Did you go there, kid? Did you see the monastery? Did you see the large cross in front of it? Did you see the cave?”

### *The Village Square*

He described a theology student’s village square to him. He had never visited the village, but could even describe the plane tree in the middle of the square. He also told him that as a student at junior high school he often sat underneath that tree and studied for his lessons. The student confirmed that the description was “photographic”

### *The Tiresome Catechism*

I was going to the Elder, in a friend’s car. My friend had also brought his fiancée along with him. On the way there I told her about the Christian way of life, something that had not especially troubled her. I did it to help her, so that she would have better access to the Elder’s way of thinking, considering that this would be the first time that she would see him.

When we arrived, I went into his cell first. Amongst other things, I also, somewhat self-complacently, mentioned my catechism during the journey. The Elder became indignant and said, “Oh you, don’t do such things! Now his fiancée has been terrorised and is saying to him: ‘Let’s go, I’m afraid of seeing the Elder, in case he makes me stick to all those things that your friend was telling me about on the way here.’”

My friend’s fiancée went in after me. My friend told everything that she had said while I was in there. They were the exact same words of the Elder. When she came out of the cell, she was shining with joy. The Elder had not made mistakes like I had, with my over-enthusiastic zeal.

### *He Melted Me Down, He Dissolved Me, He Made Me into Little Pieces*

Many young people who knew him talked about the gift of the Elder with their own contemporary vocabulary. One young man said to his friends, upon leaving the Elder’s cell: “He melted me down, he dissolved me, he made me into little pieces.”

Someone else, occupied with psychology said: “Kids, I was knocked out. He revealed all the secrets of my conscience and my sub-conscience.

A third person, a physics teacher, quite thoughtfully said, “Without doubt, we are talking about a real case.”

### *I Know You Better*

Once, when talking with him, I said spontaneously: “Elder, let me reveal my deeper self to you.” The Elder smiling and said, “What deeper self are you going to reveal, kid, because I know you even better than you know yourself.” I realized that he was right and preferred to be uncovered by the Elder rather than to reveal myself to him.

### *Discovering the Hiding-Place*

When the Elder was sick and could walk a little, he left, as the weather allowed, and hid himself in the forest for a few hours. A few people would visit him there, with his blessing. I arrived at the monastery one summer day when the Elder was in his hiding-place. I asked the Abbess if it was blessed to see him for a short while, as an exception. I told her the reason why. She gave me her blessing and described the path that I had to follow. I went into the forest but after searching for about half an hour, I was sure that I had lost the way. I found myself at the bottom of a deep valley, sweating all over, underneath the burning sun and among thorny bushes, with no way out. I felt the need to pray during that uncomfortable moment, and whispered, “Lord Jesus Christ, through the prayers of Elder Porphyrios, have mercy on me.” When I lifted my head, I noticed a piece of white cloth. It was within the branches of a tree on the opposing slope. I suddenly said, “The Elder is there,” and thanked Christ for his immediate help. The Elder’s sensitive spiritual receiver instantly “caught” my prayer and utilised it. I had lost the way, but I found my target.

Without taking my eyes off the tree, I looked around and found an unnegotiable crossing-point and I approached it, walking with great difficulty. The Elder had found an exit for my dead-end. It was something wonderful, both in reality and as a symbol. Upon arriving, I heard a conversation taking place and I was surprised. I carried on walking and saw the Elder sitting on a wooden bench, underneath a pine-tree, with a white undershirt hanging from its branches. A stranger was sitting next to him and talking to him. I walked away and waited. When the visitor left I approached and made a prostration before him. As soon as he saw me, he was glad, saying, “Well, bless you! How did you find me over here?” I told him about my small adventure and the Elder smiled with satisfaction, as a slight breeze from Evia made the burning heat more bearable. I talked with him about my urgent matter briefly. However, I received a great

blessing, so that, even unto this day, I remember that unexpected secret meeting alone with the Elder, in the forest, where silence reigns, the only exception being the concert that the cicadas had arranged around us.

### *Surgery That Did Not Take Place*

I had visited the doctor about a medical condition of mine. He advised surgery, a year later, when he would have to examine me again. I went to the Elder and told him about it with plenty of concern. As soon as he heard about it, he said to me: “So that’s what it was then! And for so many days I was asking myself what could possibly be tormenting you?” Yet again, the Elder had caught on to another personal problem of mine. He asked, “Have the doctors taken a knife to that point before?” I answered him in the negative. Then he said to me: “Why should you have surgery? You know, sometimes, if you bother those things they flare up. I say that you shouldn’t trouble it, accept it like a thorn in the flesh.”

I decided to obey the Elder’s suggestion. A year later I went to the doctor for an examination, as I had promised. After the examination he said to me: “You know the condition hasn’t worsened, but has remained stable. I say that we should push for time as much as we can so that we perform the surgery a lot later. Come and see me again next year.” At that moment, I thought that in some mysterious way the doctor had conformed to the Elder’s opinion. I did not tell him anything about it and left, having decided not to visit him anymore. So, when the year had passed I did not go for a fresh examination. However, the doctor met me at a religious gathering. He took the opportunity to mention that I would avoid surgery in the end. A new drug had been discovered in America, which cured the illness completely and it would soon be available in Greece. I still remember the Elder and I thank him noetically. I was unable to visit him because, by then, he was in the tabernacles of heaven.

### *Mishaps that Led to a Meeting*

One afternoon I was at Kallisia in the company of a doctor friend, who was established abroad, and two students. The main reason why he had undertaken such a long journey was his strong desire to receive guidance from the Elder about an urgent and burning problem of his. But the Elder was away. We were comforted a little by the stories told about the Elder by his spiritual children, who we met in the monastery yard. When darkness started to fall and we gave up all hope of the Elder coming, we sorrowfully started to go back home. I was their guide, since I knew the area better.

their guide, since I knew the area better.

However, with all the conversation and with the darkness of that cloudy night I had not noticed that we had taken a wrong turning in the forest. When I realised my mistake, I stopped and suggested that we go back, until we come across the right road. Indeed, I told them that it would be a good thing if we asked for the intercessions of the Elder in our noetic prayer so that we would not lose the way completely. So, we walked for about half an hour. Then we arrived at a crossing and I recognised the right road. However, at the same time, the headlights of a car, headed for the monastery, blinded us. The car stopped and we were most surprised to see the Elder get out of it and call us to him. Our meeting was almost unbelievable. If we had not lost the way, we would have arrived at the bus stop and left before the Elder turned up. If on the other hand, we had realised that we had lost the way just one minute later, the car, with the Elder in it, would have gone over the crossroads and we would not have met him. Our meeting was timed down to a matter of seconds. Even spaceships could not have had so much exactitude. There are certain impressive circumstances, in which the wise and man-loving Providence of God is shown. Our meeting was not by luck, chance or fate because if such things exist, God would not exist. It was not an improbable result of the law of probabilities, since we know that the Elder's prayer was hidden behind this. The Elder had seen my friend's great need to see him.

Really, the Elder put everyone else aside and went straight to my friend. He took him into the car, since it was cold outside. However, the driver, a clergyman, got out of the car and left them alone so they could discuss things comfortably. The Elder turned to me and said: "In the meantime, you'll keep the bishop company." I approached him, and, in the dark, made out the figure of a bishop who was a university professor at the Theological School. I told him about our late discovery of the contemporary starets and about his immeasurable service and offering to the people of God. He agreed and said more. When the Elder had finished with my friend, he left the car full of enthusiasm. The Elder had pointed out his most important problems to him, before my friend mentioned them. He also suggested solutions that comforted him. The bishop got into the car and we kissed the hand of both of them. Then, they continued on their way to the monastery. The bishop and university professor had gone to talk with the barely literate Elder, who, however, was taught by God.

### *You Blessed Thing, Don't Be Afraid, I'm Coming!*

One winter afternoon, a company of visitors was chatting with the Elder at Kallisia. The time flew past and it began to get dark. At that moment, one of the

Kallisia. The time flew past and it began to get dark. At that moment, one of the company remembered that he had to be in Athens at a particular time. He got up and left in a hurry. When he reached the small forest and entered the pathway, where the tips of the trees are nearly entwined, thus making the darkness unbearable, he realised that he did not have a torch. He did not have time to go back and get one so he decided to continue his journey in the dark blackness. Meanwhile, at the monastery, the conversation was flowing calmly, when the Elder jumped up all of a sudden and said, "You blessed thing, don't be afraid, I'm coming!" When he reached the darkened pathway with his torch, he found his visitor caught in some dense bushes, trembling with fear. The Elder took him calmly by the hand and led him out into the open. From there, he comfortably continued on his way. The Elder's spiritual "radar" had picked up the anguish of the visitor who lost his way in the dark woods. Truly, how often had so many of us lost our way, in the dark woods of our problems and the Elder secretly "picked up" our anguish and hastened to our prayer, to lead us out of our dead-end?

### *You'll Get Married With Difficulty*

One summer afternoon I arrived at Kallisia with two friends. God was favourable to us, because we found the Elder alone and in a good mood. He talked with each of us separately and then to all of us together. He sat on the rocks and we sat around him. My friends were facing problems in settling down with a family. To one of them he said, "You'll get married with difficulty." To the other one he said, "You won't get married, unless you change the company you keep." After a short while, my first friend came to a marriage arrangement. There was a mutual agreement and the engagement took place most quickly. My friend was surprised by the crashing failure of the Elder's prediction. I was also somewhat shocked. Since I knew the Elder better I was deeply worried, less for the Elder and more so about my friend's engagement. However, I did not externalise my worry, so as not to prejudice him. In less than a month, a serious hidden problem was discovered, something completely unexpected, a spiritual obstacle was raised and the engagement soon dissolved.

My friend eventually got married to someone else, but a lot later and after unusual difficulties. My second friend was slow to break away from his company of friends. However, when he did manage it, he was soon married. Both of the Elder's predictions came true, to the letter.

### *Tears about Something that Will Happen*

A student was facing serious psychological problems, due to a handicapped arm. When he was a small child, he found an abandoned hand grenade. As he was examining it with curiosity, the grenade exploded, damaging both his arm and his sight. He had heard about the Elder and wanted to see him. A lady who knew the Elder offered to take him in her car. She tried to encourage him as they went there by saying that God had given her eight children, eight thousand of their problems and eight million solutions to her problems.

When they arrived at Kallisia the Elder received this disabled youth with particular loving care. He kept him in his cell for a long time and he comforted him. However, while the Elder saw him out tears fell from the Elder's eyes. Many visitors wondered at this sight. In a short while the young man started to lose his eyesight, until he finally became completely blind. I visited him at the home for the blind. His great love for the Elder and the obvious strengthening of his faith in Christ, in comparison to the past, made an impression on me. The Elder foresaw his cross and strengthened his faith.

### *The Zealot, the Smoker and the Elder*

One morning I had arrived in the Elder's yard, with some company of mine. I made out an acquaintance of mine, at a distance. He was quite a zealot and a strict Christian. I approached him, and he was glad to see me suddenly before him. We said various things about the Elder, and I started to hear him say: "Some people come to the Elder who are totally out of touch and they tire him out unfairly. See! Look over there, that lady, who's smoking without shame. I really do wonder how the Elder can see her." I bit my tongue, the lady was part of my company, and the acquaintance did not know it. I chose to keep silent and not put my acquaintance in a difficult position. The Elder, however, was not so quiet. When his turn came, and he went into the Elder's cell, before me, the first words heard from his lips were "You know, I'm not strict like you." When the lady left the Elder's cell she informed me of what he had told her, rounding off his advice saying, "Your struggle for your sanctification should begin with quitting cigarettes." The Elder found the most suitable medicine for both the critic and the criticised.

### *The Hippie Visit*

The Elder recounted: "Once a hippie visited me. He was dressed in some strange, multi-coloured clothes. He was wearing beads and jewellery and asked to see me. The nuns were concerned. They came and asked me, and I said let



him come in. As soon as he sat opposite me, I saw his soul. He has a good soul, but wounded and rebellious because of that. I spoke to him with love and he was moved. "Elder," he said to me, "nobody has ever spoken like that to me until today." I told him his name, and he was taken aback because I knew it. "Well," I said to him, "God even revealed your name to me and that you travel as far as India and meet gurus there and follow them." He wondered even more. I also told him other things about himself, and he left pleased. The following week, well, what do you know; the same person turned up again, with a group of hippies. They all went into my cell together and sat around me. There was a girl with them, too. I liked them a lot. They were good souls, but wounded. I didn't tell them about Christ, because I saw that they weren't ready to listen. I spoke their language, about things they were interested in. When we had finished and they got up to leave, they said, "Elder, we would like a favour: Will you let us kiss your feet?" I was so embarrassed, but what could I do? I let them.

Afterwards they gave me a blanket as a present. I'll call them, to bring it, so that you can see it. It is very beautiful. After some time the hippie girl came to see me on her own. She was called Maria. I saw that Maria was more advanced in soul than her friends were and I first spoke to her about Christ. She accepted my words. She also came at other times. She had taken the right road. Indeed, Maria had said to her friends, "Hey, you rogues, I never ever imagined that I would get to know Christ from within a group of hippies."

The episode made an impression on me. The clairvoyant and pastoral gifts of the Elder worked together to attract, with true love, those misguided, but likeable kids, who some pietists might treat with contempt. Those kids asked for something that made me ashamed of myself. They asked to kiss the Elder's feet, and it was only their first visit. I had been coming and going for so many years and I never had the humility to consider something like that. The kids kissed the Elder's feet, like the sinful woman, who cleansed Christ's feet with myrrh and wiped them with her hair, and they also gave him a blanket. The Elder was delighted, just like a child, with his present. Of course, it was not for its material value, but for all that it stood for spiritually. I wondered at the impossible roads that Divine Grace follows in order to save souls. From that day on I also kissed the Elder's feet, while he lay there on the bed, without asking him.

### *"I'm Not Looking for a Husband". "He'll Find You Himself"*

A person close to me had taken exams and won a scholarship for England. There she would undertake post-Graduate studies in Education regarding difficult and maladjusted children. She decided that she was suited to the work, because she was a girl, and loved children a lot. However, she considered it

because she was a girl, and loved children a lot. However, she considered it necessary to get the Elder's blessing before she left Greece. We visited him together. She went into his cell first. When she came out, she was very thoughtful. She let me know that as soon as the Elder heard about England and difficult children, he said, "You not suited to such work, because you are sensitive and you won't cope. If you want you can go. But, I'm telling you that some years ago, a doctor, who was sensitive like you, asked me if she should go off for further studies, on psychopaths, in America. I advised her not to go. She didn't listen to me, she went and is now recovering herself in a psychiatric clinic". Then the girl asked the Elder, "If I don't go to England, and stay here, and get a teaching position, what should I do afterwards? I find myself in a dilemma, should I have a family or go to a monastery? I'm not attracted to either the former or the latter." The Elder said to her, "You are not suited to a monastery. You'll have a family."

"But Elder," she replied, "I'm not looking for a husband." And the Elder said to her, "There's no need to look, he'll find you, and soon." After telling me about her conversation with the Elder, the girl asked me what she should do, in my opinion. I answered that she was free and responsible to do whatever she liked. I added that, from my own experience and others, I had established that whoever followed the Elder's advice always profited, whereas whoever snubbed it, lost out. Finally, after some hesitation, she decided to be obedient to the Elder. Within a few months, a high school teacher noticed her in the waiting room for confession, as they had the same spiritual father. The teacher asked for relevant information. He got positive feedback and then proposed to her. Now they both work at a Junior High School, they have children and formed a Christian family. They frequently remember the Elder's name, with gratitude, in prayer. They met him repeatedly and gained invaluable advice for a harmonious family life.

### *The Storm That Did Not Break*

It was late afternoon in autumn, and I was with a doctor friend at the beginning of the road that leads to Kallisia. Black clouds had covered the sky, it seemed that a storm would break at almost any moment and we had forgotten to bring our umbrellas. We were troubled about whether we should set off for the Elder, or return to Athens instead. In the end, we decided to take up the risk of faith. We had a great need to see the Elder and we believed that God, by the prayers of Fr. Porphyrios, would do something to keep us from the coming downpour. We set off in good spirits. I remember that while walking along we chanted hymns and talked about various occasions with the Elder. Throughout the whole of our journey (about an hour in all), a wild wind was blowing and

the more of our journey, (about an hour in all), a fine rain was blowing and now and then it brought forceful, thick drops of rain upon our faces. Thus, we arrived at the Elder's cell, without getting wet. After waiting for quite a long time, we saw him, and were comforted spiritually. On our return, the clouds had blown away.

### *We Did Not Go Hungry*

One Sunday I set off with the same friend, very early in the morning, to go to Church at St. Nicholas in Kallisia, where Fr. Porphyrios would serve. We walked along and we saw a lot of people upon arriving. They were both inside the church and outside it. Then we realised a serious oversight of ours: we had forgotten to take food with us. The monastery did not have the ability to line up a meal, and the surrounding area was deserted. My friend said that today we would really get to know what a forced fast means. I answered saying that the Elder would take care of us through his prayer, just as Christ did in the desert with the five loaves and two fishes.

My friend looked at me and smiled somewhat ironically. We managed to see the Elder by the afternoon and then we set off for home. Our hunger was unpleasant enough. We had not eaten since the previous day, and it would still be two or three hours till we would get home. When we had gone through the forest and reached the clearing we heard a familiar voice call us. It was a doctor friend of ours, who had just arrived with his family to see the Elder. They had opened the trunk of their car, which was filled with food. They invited us to eat with them. We did not need a second invitation.

I remember that, before eating the first mouthful, I felt it was my duty of gratitude to thank the Elder secretly. Then I glanced at the friend who had accompanied me. He understood the import of it, and bent his head down, eating with an appetite. The friend's family saw the Elder quite quickly, because most of the people had already left. When they returned we all got into their car and went back to Athens. So, through the Elder's secret prayer, we escaped both hunger and walking.

### *The Car That Was Not Wrecked*

A friend, a spiritual child of the Elder, told me revealingly: "I was driving my car and I had the Elder next to me. We were going through a very mountainous, rocky region, on a narrow meandering road. Suddenly, I realized that the car was not treading on all four tyres. I looked to the left and my hairs stood on end. I saw the gap over a cliff. If not two, at least one wheel was not on the ground. I

choked out: “Elder we are slipping. He calmly touched my hand, whispering a prayer, and the car came back onto its proper course.

### *Mystery Tour*

An airforce officer recounted that one day he was taking the Elder in his car on some business of his. First, they would visit a monastery, whose exact location he did not know. When they reached a certain point on the national road between Athens and Corinth, he told him to turn right and with his guidance, they arrived outside the monastery. When they finished there, they headed off for a notary public in Corinth. When the Elder was asked if he knew the exact address of the office, he answered in the negative. They went into Corinth and he continued according to the Elder’s instructions, “now turn right, now turn left.” At some point he said to him, “It seems to me that you ought to stop here.” He got out and looked at the nearest building. They found the notary they were looking for. The Elder also finished his business there and set off for home. They stopped at the Corinth Canal for something to eat. He ordered a full portion, and the Elder ordered a tomato. After the meal, they continued the journey and at some point, he asked me to stop. They got out and sat on a rock, while the sea spread out before them below. Then the Elder said, “Now the time has come, as I promised. I will listen to you giving me a general confession of your life. But it’s better that you don’t say it, I’ll tell you it.” Then he heard all the sins that he had intended to confess coming from the Elder’s mouth, all those that he had forgotten, and even those that he had never suspected as sins of his. The Elder gave him a good spring-cleaning of the soul. He finished the account saying, “That confession will always be unforgettable.” <sup>[3]</sup>

### *The Best Colour*

The Elder showed a manageress of a couture studio, who visited him regularly, what colour she should use for a relevant show she was going to put on. However, although she had asked about the colour, she was hesitant when she got his reply. She seemed to prefer something else. Then the Elder said to her, “Can’t you see that colour, you blessed thing? It shouts out on its own.” Finally, she followed the Elder’s suggestion and was a marked success. Taken aback by his specialist knowledge she went to him after her show and thanked him. The Elder was glad, but added: “With the work that you do you’ve offered not a little vanity to ladies.”

## *The Stone Will Come Out Without Help*

I visited an friend who was an officer and spiritual child of the Elder at the Airforce's General Hospital. He was suffering from stones in the kidneys. He was in great pain and the doctors were getting ready for surgery. The Elder, who he phoned regularly, reassured him: "I see that the stone, despite being large, will come out on its own. You'll escape the operation." On the eve of the operation the stone broke in two. The two parts of the stone came out much later, with plenty of liquids and medicine.

Another woman who also suffered from kidney stones, and was frequently in pain, received similar counsel from the Elder. He used to say, "Be patient, the stone will come out on its own." However, the last time that she was in great pain, he said to her, "This time you won't escape an operation". Indeed, the doctors did have to perform surgery on her.

## *Baptism by Air*

A couple visited the Elder and was very upset. They asked him to pray that their sick newborn infant, in hospital, would get well. The Elder prayed, however, as they were leaving he called them back and asked them what name they were planning on giving their child. They mentioned the name. The Elder told them to go to the hospital. When they got there, their child had died. Crushed, after some time, they went to the Elder again, to tell him their pain and to complain he gave them hope even though their child was dying. The Elder answered, "I knew your child was dying, but it wasn't right for me to tell you about it then Do you know why I called you back and asked you about the name of your child? Because as soon as you left, I baptized the infant in the air, and gave him the name you told me."

## *He Has Returned Now*

Somebody who had gone for further studies abroad was supposed to return to Greece at the end of December. In September of the same year, the name of the absent graduate student was mentioned in a conversation with some friends. The Elder told them, quite naturally, "He has returned now." They were taken aback by the Elder's odd words, because according to the curriculum he should return in December. However, they asked, out of curiosity, and they learnt that he really had returned earlier than expected.

### *The Third Waterfall*

A couple who were friendly with the Elder, told him what a pleasant time they had on their trip to countries abroad. At some point, the wife started to tell him how beautiful two waterfalls they visited were. Then the Elder said that the third waterfall was much more beautiful. The husband was puzzled and said that there wasn't a third waterfall. Then the wife pointed out to her husband that the Elder was right, because when they were there, she had moved away from him at some point, and saw a third waterfall, but had forgotten to tell him about it.

### *The High Voltage Cables*

A lady, who was acquainted with the Elder, was negotiating the purchase of a spacious house, offered at a very reasonable price. When she met the Elder, she asked his blessing for the imminent purchase. He revealed that thick high-voltage cables passed over the house, and rejected it, because those cables lead to health problems. Some days later the lady asked a expert scientist about the matter. He told her exactly what the Elder had told her.

### *Yesterday I Saw in Your Thoughts...*

A friend phoned me to let me know that the Elder wanted to get in touch with me, because he "saw in my thoughts" something that troubled him. I visited him at once and he said to me, "Yesterday, I saw your thoughts concerned with that matter, which we said you were to no longer think about, because it causes spiritual damage. That's why I was troubled and told your friend to let you know, so I could tell you to be careful. Get that matter out of your thoughts, kid, don't worry yourself needlessly". I was amazed yet again. Really, that was the truth, just as he had told me. I realized my mistake and thanked him. He gave me further instructions on how to fight against temptation with greater success. It was clear that the Elder functioned like super-television that picked up not only physical images, but spiritual ones too.

### *A Reply to a Thought*

I thought about getting the Elder's blessing to give his telephone number to people that had asked me for it. As soon as I went into his cell, the first thing he did was pull up the blanket to reveal the telephone underneath. The Elder gave me the answer, before I even managed to articulate my request.

The Elder often answered symbolically and obscurely. Regrettably, I did not have the spiritual readiness to grasp many such answers.

### *Measurement from a Distance*

I was in the Elder's cell with a family of friends, who wanted to rent a house in some part of Athens. The Elder, had never passed by that place before, however, he "saw" the point where the house was, and advised them not to rent it because it was less than a hundred metres away from the traffic fumes of a main street. They objected and said that the road was more than 200 metres away. Then the Elder replied, "Don't measure the length of the boundary road, in order to find out the house's distance from the main street. Make a reckoning of a direct line from the main street until that house. Because the fumes don't travel around the boundary road, but come directly to the house. It's not only the fumes from that road, but from the smaller ones too. Because, near the house, one road goes like that, another like that, and another like that," he said, gesturing with his hands. It was a complete description of the house and the roads that surrounded it, just as though he was there and could see it.

### *Satan Hems You In*

The Elder was revealing to a friend. He "saw" his soul, like we see a person's face. He said to him, "When Satan hems you in and puts pressure on you, do not stand still, like some people who become depressed and think about it for hours, as if some very serious problem is troubling them, when nothing of the sort is happening. Satan has simply nailed him down. You should have a readiness to react, to resist, and to throw off Satan's siege. Just like someone who has been nailed to the spot by some thugs - if he makes some sharp movement and throws his hands up in the air, he throws them all over the place. He breaks away from their clutches and turns in another direction, towards Christ, who frees him." Then, the Elder was silent in prayer and when the visitor got up to leave, said to him, "I've seen your soul clearly now. You have psychological difficulties that often nail you down but Christ's Grace comes and frees you." My friend was amazed. He said that nobody could describe that aspect of his soul, so precisely and to the point, as the Elder had.

### *The Latch That Became Unstuck*

On a visit of mine, the Elder told me, "I was at our skete on the Holy Mountain. There, one day, my monks were irritated, because a latch had got

...monks there, one day, my monks were angry, because a monk had got stuck in the door and they couldn't get it out. They tried, they hit it, they pulled it, they got angry, nothing: the latch was wedged there. Then I got up and told them to leave it to me. I looked at it very carefully. I made one simple movement and got it out. The monks looked at me with wonder. I said to them, "What are you looking at me like that for, you blessed things? I didn't do anything special, I made one small movement, but I did it with prayer and calm. You, the way you had become angry, you wouldn't have got the latch out, even tomorrow. When the soul is upset, reason gets clouded and cannot see properly. Only when the soul is calm does it illumine reason, so that it can clearly see the state of each thing."

How much could that incident help us in our everyday relations with people and things! How much it could help us with our inner calm, which is not acquired by psychological instructions and psychiatric drugs, but with sanctity.

### *Prayer that Calms Down a Psychiatric Patient*

A spiritual daughter of the Elder told me: I worked as a nurse at a psychiatric clinic. I faced many difficulties there, which I overcame with prayer. One day I went through a great trial. A psychiatric patient had a crisis and wanted to attack me with a piece of broken glass. I was extremely terrified and immediately started praying: "Lord Jesus Christ, through the prayers of Elder Porphyrios, have mercy upon me." In one swift movement, I avoided his attack, and I spoke to him in a friendly manner. He gradually calmed down, until I took the glass from his hand. When I visited the Elder, he beat me to it, saying, "I saw you having a great fright with that psychiatric patient, but Christ saved you from his attack."

### *About a Spiritual Father*

A few months before I met Fr. Porphyrios, because I was in great spiritual need and, at the time, a close friend told me about some sojourning Athonite Elder, who had the gift clairvoyance. I visited him, and indeed, without the blessing of my spiritual father. But instead of calming my soul, that old man increased my upheaval. When I mentioned it to my spiritual father, he replied, "If you had told me about it, I wouldn't have given you a blessing to go to that particular man." When the fullness of time came and, with a referral from my spiritual father, I got to know Fr. Porphyrios, who put me completely at ease, I mentioned that meeting with the Athonite Elder. Fr. Porphyrios knew him, and said to me, somewhat reservedly, "Now God has given him rest. This matter is



very delicate. He didn't manage too well, the blessed thing. He told someone that he was going to become a bishop, and now he wants to throw his robes away. May God forgive him."

From that event, I realized that God is never unfair with us, but sends us the elder who we need. Who exactly, how and where, is unknown to us, yet known to His own All-powerful and All-wise Love. Anyway, from my first contact with Fr. Porphyrios, I instinctively felt that he understood and helped me, quite independently of the information given by my perceptions. The pure soul has its own "perceptions" and its own "information" in Christ.

### *An Unforgettable Walk*

In a meeting with Elder Porphyrios in his cell, I told him how much inner peace I get from speaking with him and reading books from the Church Fathers. He said to me, "You should read books from the Fathers, you should take them with you and get out of Athens, away from the traffic fumes, that damage your health. Take a long walk in the forest, take in some air." I kissed his hand and left. I took a pathway and went deep into the forest, taking a long route. I walked for about an hour, deep in thought and prayer, when, towards the end of my journey, I suddenly see the Elder walking ahead of me on the pathway opposite. I was overjoyed with this unexpected meeting. How did he find me in the middle of the forest? When he approached me, he said, with a smile, with that humble, and yet noble, smile of his:

"I see that you really did get your fresh air. Let's go and walk together now, to talk about the holy Fathers. An unforgettable walk in the woods followed in the company of the Elder, who revealed to me, as far as I was able to accept it, secrets of the wisdom of the Holy Fathers, adapted to the needs of our time.

### *Time to Concentrate on the Fathers*

Since I liked reading books that referred to the Fathers, I spent a lot on them, and I put off studying the actual Fathers themselves. The Elder realized this, without me telling him. In a conversation of ours, he suddenly said to me, "It's time you left the books that refer to the Fathers, and start reading the Fathers themselves regularly. But don't think that it is enough just to read the Fathers, you must have a spiritual guide for that reading so that you won't be misled." When I started to read, looking at the bulk of the books, I asked him, "Elder, how will I ever manage to read them all?" He answered, "Slowly but surely - pray while you study, keep notes, then come and read them to me, so that we can

talk about them. You know, the Fathers refresh me, whereas all the other things I hear, worldly things, problems, worries, tire me out.”

### *I See Within His Soul*

The Elder saw whatever God revealed inside people’s souls. Regarding someone I knew, he said, “I see, not too clearly, a bad thing within his soul. It is a wound, an old one. It is demonic. I don’t know exactly what it is. Maybe God will show me what it is later.” Then some weeks later he said, “That bad thing that I saw in his soul, could leave, but only if he becomes holy. A man changes with holiness, however much of a sinner he is, all the wounds of the soul leave. Today the doctors call them psychiatric illnesses<sup>[4]</sup>, whereas in reality it is a demonic influence due to sin.”

### *She’ll Have Children*

Regarding an acquaintance of mine, who got married to a young wife while he was much older, the Elder said to me, “His wife is young. She’ll have children.” After that my acquaintance’s wife had a child, and he was satisfied with that. His spiritual father was concerned, and urged him not to limit himself to one, but to have more children, as long as there was a possibility of childbearing. I put his spiritual father at ease telling him that it was impossible that he would end up with only one child. He asked me, “How do you know?” And I replied, “Elder Porphyrios didn’t say that his wife would have a child, but that she would have children, something that means at least two.” Indeed, they had another child three years later. If they will have more, God and the Elder will know about it.

### *Children’s Problems*

A mother, who had serious problems with her children, asked him, “Elder, were my children born like that or are their problems due to our mistakes.” He replied, “They are due to our mistakes. They are also influenced by their friends who live sinfully and slander Christ.”

### *How The Doubting Hunter Was Convinced*

Two hunters met the Elder in the forest and accused monks of not doing anything for others. The Elder answered that they pray and God helps them know themselves and others, in order to help with their problems. The hunters doubted his words. Then the Elder called one of them by his name and revealed

that he had just returned from America, where he had undergone a serious operation, mentioning relevant details about the surgery. The man who received this revelation was obliged to tell his amazed friend that it was the truth. The hunters became friends of his from that moment.

### *Instructions For An Unknown Journey*

Bricks were needed for the monastery. The Elder told one of his spiritual children to go to a certain brickyard in the area and place an order. However, he did not know about it, just like the Elder, who, however, gave him such an accurate description of the route, so that he found it more easily.

### *Hints About Studying Exam Subjects*

He advised a young spiritual daughter of his to study hard, because the University Entrance exams would begin in a few days. She answered that it was much too late to cover the gaps in her knowledge. The Elder said it was not too late and that she would manage to read, for example, this and that chapter. The young girl did not pay much attention, but sat the exams, basing herself mainly on the general knowledge she had from High School. In surprise, she noticed that the subjects they asked them to write about were those that the Elder had mentioned to her. She had not believed him, so she had not studied them, and failed, of course.

### *The Blind Elder's Suggestion for the Improvement of an Icon*

A spiritual child of his painted and brought him the icon that he had ordered. The icon had been painted according to the instructions of the Elder, who had already lost his sight. He found what was good about it, and pointed out the points where it could be improved.

### *God Sees a Curve*

The Elder said, "Man sees like this (straight), while God sees like this (a curved track)." He said that while making relative gestures with his hands, just like we would say someone can see the other side of the moon. It seems that the Elder also saw, to some degree, in a curved track.

### *Warning: The Devil is Ready to Pounce*

A few months before his demise, the Elder went to the Holy Mountain. At the same time the building work for the monastery was at its height. However, unexpected problems and difficulties appeared, that often agitated the workers. So much so, that when the Elder on the Holy Mountain “saw” what was really happening, he phoned the spiritual child, who was supervising the workers. He told him, “Be careful, because I see the devil waiting to pounce and create problems and obstruct the work.” When I arrived at the monastery and learnt about it, I was yet again amazed at the Elder’s gift of clairvoyance. I asked myself what problems could the devil possibly create? I had not managed to complete my thoughts, when I heard loud shouting and quarrels amongst the workers. I asked what was happening and was told that a large cement mixer was nearly ruined due to a worker’s carelessness. The works supervisor prevented the disaster at the last minute. However, the higher supervisor, was following him vigilantly from Mount Athos, ready to intervene with his prayer, to prevent every attempt at sabotage from the devil, who was lying in wait.

### *The Demoniac who Accused the Elder*

A restless pilgrim arrived at Kallisia, with his parents, to visit the Elder. As soon as he went into the cell, the Elder saw the demon quite clearly within his soul. He then started praying intensely and delayed the visitor, until he could get the demon out of him, but it stayed, it did not come out. His relatives told the Elder that it was not worth the trouble of concerning himself with that man, because he was not in his right mind, and had psychiatric illness. The visitors left. After some time, the relatives suggested that he go to see the Elder again. He replied, “I will go to other priests for confession, but not to Fr. Porphyrios, because he is a magician and does magic. It reminds one of those unfortunate Pharisees who said, “You have a demon” to Christ and that, “he casts out demons by the ruler of demons.” It is expected that those suffering from demonic possession would slander Christ and the saints.

### *I am an Orthodox Christian*

The Elder told me: “One day someone came and said to me: “I have heard about you, you are something like a medium, a wizard, a fakir, a guru.” and I said to him, “What are all those things you are talking about, you blessed thing? I am a Christian, Orthodox, not only am I not like those things you say, but I make war against them.”

<sup>[1]</sup> Τὸ διορατικὸν (dioratiko) - clairvoyance, perspicacity, clear-sight, spiritual perceptiveness. This is

sometimes called the gift of discernment, because clairvoyance is usually associated with discernment or *διάκρισις* (*diakrisis*), i.e. good judgement, discrimination.. Unfortunately, due to the centuries long absence of Orthodoxy from English speaking culture “clairvoyance” has come to be associated with astrologers, mediums and all sorts of demonic practices. The Elder’s gifts had absolutely no connection with the powers of darkness. His miraculous gifts came from the Divine Uncreated Grace of the Holy Spirit. In an Orthodox context “clairvoyance” means the perceptive ability to see into the very soul of man, in the first stages, from experience, and in a more perfect form, by prayer alone. A prerequisite of this gift, which is more of a cross, is purification from the passions through ascetic struggle, without vanity or pride. It is only ever granted to those who have acquired extreme humility, otherwise it takes on the demonic forms described above. The Prophets had this gift, as did many saints of the Church. The 50th Psalm (51st in most English bibles) expresses this concept, “Behold, you desire truth in the inward parts and in the hidden part you will make me know wisdom...” *Translator*.

<sup>[2]</sup> See footnote above.

<sup>[3]</sup> The full story is also related by the officer in question, Stavros Kalkandes, in the book, *Elder Porphyrios: Testimonies and Experiences* by Klitos Ioannides, published by the Convent of the Transfiguration, Athens 1997, page 154 - 163.

<sup>[4]</sup> The Greek word, *ψυχασθένεια* (*psychastheneia*) literally means «sickness of the soul”. *Translator*.

## Publisher's Supplement II

The Elder loved all people of whatever creed, background or ideological belief. Nevertheless, he was Orthodox through and through, and did not compromise his Orthodox Christian faith. He believed and taught that the Orthodox Spirit is the true spirit. The Elder never gave sermons or talks. However, he conveyed his teaching through countless conversations and discussions with his spiritual children. Some of these talks have been recorded in rough notes, and some have even been tape-recorded. What follows is the translated transcript of a cassette containing a conversation with some young people who were attracted by eastern religions. We present this translation here in the English edition. The original Greek cassette, with further conversations and an accompanying pamphlet is also available from the publishers.

### *The Orthodox Spirit is the True Spirit*

Elder: I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only-begotten, begotten of the Father before all ages. Light of Light; true God of true God; begotten, not made; of one essence with the Father, by Whom all things were made; Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became man. And He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried. And the third day He rose, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead; Whose kingdom shall have no end....

This is what we believe. So, within our religion, it says, that He is the founder of the Orthodox Faith and that all religions are not like this religion. There is only one religion: The Orthodox Christian Religion. And, this Orthodox Spirit is the true spirit. The other spirits are spirits of delusion and their teachings are mixed up.

Here the God of the Orthodox Faith is a God, Who, if we also called him Love, like in the Scripture, it is the same thing. God is called Love. Whoever has Love is of God. About God then, many people say "God is Love, you poor old thing, that's the way God is."

thing, that's the way God is.

But God is Love. Yet God is not just Love, He is also Justice. He is just. A thief or a pickpocket, who lives off others, cannot put him in his place.

You'll tell me, "but, He's Love, isn't He?" However, that is the way our religion is. And that's the way it should be, so that we confess what the attributes of the Divine are. However, we do not know for sure: God can place them all in Paradise. Even place all of them there, from all the religions. However, that is not written on our papers, nor should we believe it. Even if God can take them all as his children. Are you listening to me?

Other: Yes, Elder, yes.

Elder: That's what we believe. But you'll say, "Why can't we say that we are all His children?" No! We can't say that. That's the way we should comprehend it. What God does at the Second Coming is another matter altogether. We cannot sort it out from now, so that it can all be plain sailing. We should comprehend it like that. It comes like that. But you'll say, "it's only human" But that is the way we understand it; Scripture makes us comprehend it in this way. It doesn't tell us what God is like. Nobody can know what God is like.

Other: Yes, Elder.

Elder: Well then, that's how I believe things are (...) If you get me mixed up, what can I do?

Other: Elder, you mean, we can get you mixed up?

Elder: They are religious people. Well, they'll ask here and they'll ask there, "what are those kids?" Look, it's on there. They gave me their telephone number. Oh dear, oh dear, they are involved with gurus and yogis, and the like, and preach such things! And they convert people. And say that the Elder says this and that. Ah! They are the Elder's kids. Oh dear, oh dear, my God!

Other: I know, Elder, but no!

Elder: You know, do you? If only you knew. For that reason, because I'm an elder I have to be honest. I have so many people. You don't know that all, all the people here on my telephone, come from all the kingdoms of the world to phone me up. At night, whatever time it is; from all the kingdoms. What South Africa, Cape Town, Johannesburg, America, Canada, I don't know where else... from all over the world. And then let them hear that I'm like that, that I'm a free spirit and accept all religions? No, I won't accept that. Whoever comes and tells me, even if an angel were to come and tell me, "It is like so-and-so believes" I'll say, "No. You are lying, you are not a good spirit. You are an evil spirit and you are telling me that". That's what I'll tell the angel, I won't believe him. (...)

Of course, I also do not want you going round spreading propaganda here and there saying, "all the religions are one. They don't have any differences, they all belong to God, go to whichever one you want." I do not want that. I cannot stand

belong to God, go to whichever one you want. I do not want that. I cannot stand that. My spirit cannot stand that. (...)

I've lived in the wilderness, I've struggled, I've been through fasts, hard times, vigils, nakedness, with worn out clothes, with..., and all that for the love of Christ. And I lived amongst holy people, but they were Orthodox Christians. Have you understood?

I cannot do anything else, I have understood Orthodoxy, and it is like that. The devil exists, and all the things written in scripture exist. The devil, hell, everything. How beautifully it places it though, and how well it satisfies the ... that feeling of justice that we mentioned. An attribute of God's justice. You'll see that we believe in the devil. We say that the devil exists, and he really does exist. He is the opposing spirit.

Well then... what does our religion do? It comes... are you listening to me?

Other: I'm listening, Elder.

Elder: It comes (when you are reading Scripture) and says: "My children, pay attention. We must take care to cling to Christ and become saints. Then we will enter his Church, and within his Church, we will all become one body. That is to say, all Orthodox Christians. When we achieve that, then for us, who will have managed to enter the Church, for us neither death, nor hell, nor the devil exists..." It is written in the Gospel? Have you found it?

They haven't found it. It is there, but you have to have the spirit of God in order to understand it. Well it comes and it takes you, and you believe exactly as it actually is; that there is no death. Don't you like this religion?

Other: I like it, Elder, of course, I like it. But I believe that when we have love we understand others. We don't consider the Muslims to be unbelieving.

Elder: Kid, that's what I want to say. We understand them and we see them, but we say, "they are unbelieving". They do not believe in the true God. Do you understand? Man has made many gods, and the gods are very many. Even those wastrels, even these atheists, even they believe in god; that is to say, in a god who is not true. They believe in the flesh, in the passions, in that thing, in material in... everyone believes something. Despite the fact that they say god does not exist, yet they all worship something. "One works for what one worships" It means, for example, you are a fornicator, you are a man of the flesh, well, you work for the flesh, for material things. Have you understood?

Other: It's like that.

Elder: It's a complete system. You have to study it and not say superficial words, which are not (correct). We cannot say what this person or that person says. We cannot. We must see where the truth is. The truth is in Orthodoxy. I have experienced this and I know this with God's Grace. I have lived amongst many holy people who fall within this spirit of truth. There are many lights that



many holy people, who have within the spirit of truth. There are many lights that one can see and be impressed by, but there is only one true Light.

We must think about all this. And if you say, “but you are deluded!” Kid, if only the whole world could fall into such delusion! And imagine and think about God like I do. This is besides the fact that I still have not become like I should. However, I struggle and I want (...)

There is another spirit, which is called the evil spirit. It will take care to say, “I’ll sort that old man out. I’ll humiliate him. I’ll not have all those people running there and learning this and that!” It exists; it is the bad spirit.

Other: I know, Elder.

Elder: Yes, it could be abolished tomorrow. But it will be abolished one day, when everything will end and we will go to a new creation, as our religion believes. If you want we can talk about it a little bit, you can study it a little, think about it, and you’ll see that it is worth worshipping the only True God: Our Lord Jesus Christ.

You cannot have just anybody saying: “I am sent from God and I have brought a new truth that suits people today.” God’s truths, are those that He has said from the beginning. There are no other truths. There are no new truths, because the world has advanced and science and men have gone to the stars!

Do you understand?

Other: Yes, Elder.

Elder: If someone goes to the stars and says, “There are people up there too...” and we see them, it won’t ruin my way of thinking. I’ll say that Christ is also up there, and that God is there. He has also been there. Have you heard us say, “the King of the Heavens.”

Other: Yes, Elder.

Elder: The King of the Heavens is the Holy Spirit. In our Church, this is how we start our ceremonies and sacrifices. We say, how do we say it... “O Heavenly King and Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, Who art in all places and fillest all things, O Treasury of good things and Giver of Life, Come and abide in us, and cleanse us of all impurity, and of Thy Goodness save us.”

Go with Orthodoxy, you guys! You are fine. I love you. You’ll say, “why are you gathering us in from there?” Well! Prayer brought it again! Like the Grace of God is bringing you close to me. But you kick: “Sai Baba, so and so, and such and such, are good and Mohammed is good, and this person is good and that person is good.” Do you understand?

But you’ll say, “Should we fight against them?” But who’s fighting against them, kid? Our religion does not fight against anyone. Can’t you see that we are so much like this that we don’t even go to vote; we don’t have political parties, we pray for everyone?

Why shouldn't you approach the Church? Oh you, [mentions name], use your brain, don't look over there.

Some lady went and read the Psalter, where it says, "Bring more evils upon them, Lord; bring more evils upon the glorious of the earth."<sup>[1]</sup> She says to me, "What is that then? Can God say that?" I say to her, "That there Psalter is written in another language. The attitude that they are translating is like this: "My God, make them all good, edify them, bring them back on the right path."

Other: Yes, Elder.

Elder: Only the Gospel alone is so clear and beautiful. The rest is difficult. You must have the spirit of God to explain it. She took it, you took it and you say: "Hell, the devil, all that, oh no! oh no! What are you saying man, that I should believe in the devil? What are those things, they are ridiculous."

Yet, you ask me and I say: "The devil exists." But you'll say, "You just told us that he does not exist. But we must first reach that point, with God's grace, where the devil and death and hell will be abolished for us. Then we can go on to live in the joyfulness of God, and we will never think of death. Then the end of your life will come and you'll have your foot in the grave. You can plant fig trees, walnut trees, cypresses... you can build orchards for your fellow man... you can build churches and one foot will be in the grave.

Why do you do that? Out of love. You believe that death does not exist and you want your fellow-man, who will come here again, to find something. You want them to become good. You don't want them to be thieves and steal from one another. That's why you plant the fruit trees and the nuts and the figs. That is why you build a church and everything else. Out of love.

It is not a matter of going to the Turk to kill him because he is a Turk. Well, that is human and happens out of necessity. But you'll say, "Why should war take place? If we do that thing, and have one religion, we won't argue, we won't have war, all that will be missing."

That's what they say, but it's not like that. What are you going to do with it? (The one religion). We here, the Greeks, have one religion. We are Christians, if there are some foreigners, they are only a few. Yet, you see today that we quarrel with one another and we've become a thousand pieces. And from us Greeks, from us Orthodox Christians, we have become atheists and I don't know what. Only the religion of Christ unites and we must all pray to enter this religion. That is the way union will happen, and not by believing that we are all the same and that all religions are the same.

Other: But Elder, don't all religions teach love?

Elder: Kid! What love do they teach? Don't be stupid! Hush up! True love is the love of Christ. Don't think of parents who love their children.

Other: Those of us who have been born under those vibrations.

Elder: Hey, leave Sai Baba's vibrations out of it! Leave that, those things are not like that, they are different. This is the truth, as it says it over there. It's not like that, my girl. Take measures and talk to the kids. Find Mrs X and tell her, "Kid, that's what the elder says." What is all that that she says?"

Other: No, she also knows.

Elder: I don't know. We must become Christians. Leave Baba alone. God can even enlighten him and he could become a Christian. Then he could get the spirit of God and preach Christianity, who knows? Do you know how many people that has happened to? If they are a good, simple spirit... And God is everywhere present. He is the supreme nous, who knows everything, - don't interrupt -, God knows and arranges things, but it doesn't show. Because when it shows and he takes care to sort out this person and that person, then He Himself has left the path that he has marked out. This is the path - Man is free to choose one thing or another - through his freedom. And this free will is what God respects. He respects man. He cannot say to him, "Hey! Where are you going? Come over here?" Is someone who commits murder or torments others a man of God? He could be a man of God, but the spirit that possesses him, so that he does that evil, is from the devil. It is not the good spirit of God. Come on, we'll talk about it.

Other: Yes, Elder.

Elder: I am illiterate, but don't think that I haven't been to school. I was brought up in the desert and have been obedient to two respected elders. You'll tell me, "Tell us!" but I've got the other thing, [mentions name], I can't speak. I'm an old man of 90 years and I get tired. Sometimes when I wake up ...like now I've just woken up from some sleep - because I was awake all night - and I have a little courage. Well think about it, my [mentions name]...

Read the Gospel. Read it often. You cannot say that I have read it. The Gospel has treasures and solves all problems. It is philosophy, real philosophy. It is philosophy from revelation. It is the highest philosophy.

Even though, the world now tries to turn to matter. To disregard the spirit, to disregard values. Man created those all those values, little by little, with God's Grace. Man created them with God's help. The family and all those lovely things.

If we disregard them, the earth here, our life, become chaos. It becomes hell, with drugs and that... Man starts seeking out sensual pleasure, and wants to be satisfied by it... Look! Can't you see all the kids who commit suicide and go mad? Why don't you go along to the psychiatric wards to see young kids, 15, 16, 20 years old, 25, 30, who are tormented?

You'll say this, "Why doesn't God look at them." But that's it. God looks at

then. But God cannot intervene. However, God's plan could turn out to be that people gain some insight. They'll see the chaos vividly before them, and they'll say, "Hey! We're falling into chaos. We are losing ourselves. Everyone turn back, turn back, we've been led astray." They'll then return to the way of God and the Orthodox faith will shine.

This is what we aim for and this is how we want things to happen, little by little, with the Grace of God. God works secretly. He does not want to influence man's freedom. He brings about in such a way that gradually) little by little, man goes where he should. Well, these things I'm telling you are things of the moment.

Other: I know, Elder.

Elder: Yes, but God has also got to give me strength so that I can tell you about it some time. Nothing happens with those other things. They have conjuring tricks and things like that. And those... those... all those things. In our religion, we have everything. Do you understand?

Other: Yes, Elder.

Elder: Everything. And materialisation and everything, through the saints. But there are two kinds of materialisation. Good and evil. Do you understand?

Other: Yes.

Elder: Of course, someone can say a prayer, because others don't have cooking oil and are suffering without the oil. He opens his hands and fills the jars with oil. Well, a guru can do something else, another kind of materialisation, but it is not the same. It is not from the good spirit. Because, as we said, there is also evil. And evil has the power to give to the person, who believes in evil, who lives evil, it has the power to make him able to do it. That's why there are various witches, gurus, fakirs and I don't know what.

Other: It's like that, Elder.

Elder: Forgive me for speaking to you like this. Kids, good kids and you are good kids, and well-behaved kids. But what use is that? Is everyone who is good and well-behaved in the truth? We often see people who are well-behaved and yet they are not really like that. You must come so that we can talk about it. I can't now. What can I tell you? We must break it off. Do you know how sad I am about that? If you knew how much I love you ... I love you very, very much. You'll tell me, "Why don't you pray so that God enlightens us?" I pray, but I am not so powerful. And I, and perhaps you too, will insist on that (your views). I don't know what is keeping you from God. But the truth is here. You must learn that. You must study it well, and then if your spirit says, "this is a false religion", then you should go with Sai. What does Sai, the new herald of God, who brings the new truth that suits the world now say? We should have freedom. God is

love, there is no fear anywhere. Take girls and party.

Other: No Elder, he is very strict, really very strict.

.Elder: He could be. But we must see. But, well, kid [mentions name], haven't you understood my words now? Leave it.

Other: I understand, dear Elder, I understand...

Elder: Yes, I know kid, I know what?

Other: I'm not supporting anybody.

Elder: But I now know, with God's Grace, if Sai or anyone else is like that. Do you understand? Anyway. Kid, we've got Masons. We've got all sorts of things, who believe everything and go with Satan, and do satanic manifestations and strange things. Because they exist. Satan exists, and strange, evil, things exist. I'll let you go now my [mentions name]. I pray that the Lord enlightens you. It all needs some discussion. I'll let you go and I pray that God enlightens you all, so that we can know Him and love Him. That's what I pray. Well, goodbye.

Other: Thank you, Elder.

Elder: Forgive me if I upset you. That's the way it came to me, do you think that...

Other: How can you say that, Elder? Even when you reprimand it is balsam to the soul.

Elder: But everything becomes holy, when there is grace. Well then, goodbye, goodbye, God be with you.

Other: Thank you, dear Elder.

Elder: I pray humbly for you.

Other: Your blessing.

End of supplement.

<sup>[1]</sup> 1 Actually from the Song of Isaiah, one of the Biblical Canticles used in the Matins Service, according to the Septuagint - Isaiah 26:15. *[Translator]*.

## GIFT OF FORESIGHT AND CLAIRVOYANCE (continued)

### *The Elder Finds the Water*

For many people who hardly knew him, he was the “monk who finds water”. But what hadn’t the Elder found, with the Grace of Christ? It is, however, a fact that he accurately pointed out many underground water sources and streams. He located them, not only by going to the actual spot, but from a distance, by transferring the spirit to the “depths of the earth.”

On another occasion, he saw, in spirit, the “depths of the sea”. Here, he made out some sunken treasure, under a ship that was moving at the time. Its engineer was talking on the phone to a friend at the time, and the friend happened to be in front of the Elder. The Elder did not add to the incident.

### *The Elder Does Not Use His Gift for His Own Benefit*

The Elder did not use his gift of clairvoyance and foresight for his own benefit. He did not use it for material benefit, so that he could become rich, or in order to make an impression, to gain glory. He preferred to be a poor and unseen ascetic, like all the saints of our Church. Two things, at least, are evidence of this. First, he had detachment from material things throughout his life. Secondly, although he was, for decades, the priest of a church in central Athens, very few people knew him. This was mainly because he avoided self-promotion. He did not abuse his gift, but used it, for people’s spiritual benefit, to the “Glory of God”.

### *Speaking In Tongues*

#### *With A French Woman - Without An Interpreter*

One day a French woman visited him. She was in his cell for quite a while, and when she came out, she shone with joy. The French woman did not know a word of Greek. The Elder did not know one word of French. What language did they communicate with? Perhaps with the international language of love, that he

knew to the highest degree. Possibly, the language that people will speak in Paradise will be somewhat similar.

## Publisher's Supplement III

### *A. About the French Woman*

This incident with the French woman seems unbelievable. Yet, it is true. The Frenchwoman is still alive and is now an Orthodox Nun. We found two ladies who were in the Elder Porphyrios' cell at that time and we asked them to tell us what actually happened.

Mrs. Tasoula E. gave us the following simple written description:

"One day my friend Eleni D. picked me up and we went to see the Elder again. A lot of people were there, as usual. She went in and said to the Elder:

There's a little French girl outside, brought along by a lady, who I don't know. They want to kiss your hand.

He says: "Bring them in."

They go in and my friend was standing there. The Elder asked, "Do any of you know French, so that we can talk?" And my friend says:

"Yes, Elder, Tasoula's outside (referring to me) and they called me.

I go in and the Elder said to me:

"Ask her what work she does, and if she is married"

I ask her and she answers:

"I'm not married and I am a professor of letters." Then, she starts to cry.

"Ask her," the Elder told me, "does she believe in God?"

"Then she, with sobs, said, "No! I am a nihilist, everything is nothing." Then she bent close to the Elder, at his knees.

Then the Elder said to me, "Leave." Me and the lady who accompanied her went out. But, my friend, Eleni remained inside. She said that the Elder held her head and after a while said to her, "Do you live with your mother?" And she answers him! "Or with somebody else?" And she cries.

The Elder said to her, "You are a very kind soul!" and other things that my friend didn't hear. However, she saw that the Elder talked to her, and she understood him completely. Then he turned to my friend and said, "You, go outside too!" Then my friend turned to him naively and said to the Elder, "Shall I bring the lady who knows French back in?" He then shouted, "I told you to leave!" Only the Elder and the French girl remained, for quite a while. When the French girl came out, she was ecstatic. She came to me and said, "Who told you



the Elder doesn't know French?"

"Yes!" I said to her, in amazement, "He doesn't know French!!! She was filled with emotion and said to me, "It's not possible! I'll soon be back again!!!"

Mrs. Eleni D. told us the following, verbally, taken from her recorded conversation in Greek.

"What do you remember about that French girl?"

"Ah, her... Well, well, well! Hasn't Tasoula written it down?"

"Well, she's written it by hand, but it's not so complete... when you write by hand you only say a few things..."

"I go in and say: "Elder, there's a young girl outside, who is French. A lady brought her to kiss your hand."

"And you're still keeping her outside, kid? Tell her to come in..."

"Elder, how will you talk with each other?"

"Tell her to come in..."

I go outside and I say, "Where's the French girl? She comes, brought by a lady in black, and she was a slim young girl, quite pretty. She couldn't have been more than twenty-five years old, possibly even younger. Then, trying to be clever I say straightaway... "Tasoula, you come in too, and translate for the Elder..."

"Did Tasoula speak French?"

"Tasoula, of course. She also went in. The Elder says, "Tell her to tell me what she's called." The girl says her name and Tasoula translates it.

"Why did she come here?"

"As a tourist."

"What job does she do?"

"She's a teacher," she said. Well, then the girl listened to the translator... He asked if she'd got parents. She said that she had her mother..."Does she live with her mother?" She hesitated to answer... "I don't remember if she said 'yes' or 'no'. I didn't understand, because she answered in French. Well, then the Elder said to Tasoula:

"Well, now go on then, leave..."

"Elder, how will you talk to the girl? Look, Tasoula's here," I say. Elder insists with Tasoula.

"Go..." He didn't tell me to leave and I sat there ... the girl waited. The Elder said to Tasoula before she left. "Tell her to kiss my hand" The girl bent over to kiss his hand ... I mean, we had to persuade her to kiss his hand ... But the Elder wanted her near him. He then took her head in both his hands and the girl was moved. Then, the Elder started to speak. "Did you come here with your mama?" he said.

"Did he speak in Greek?"

Did he speak in Greek?

"In Greek, of course..."

"Really?"

"Yes, because she had said, through Tasoula, that she was an atheist. "Now then, you think you are an atheist, your soul is very kind, very good, what do you teach the kids?" The French girl answered. I don't know what her answer was.

"Did she answer in French?"

"Sure, of course"

"And the Elder spoke in Greek?"

"In Greek, and she spoke in French..."

"And Tasoula, the French speaker, had left, and you remained?"

"Me, who didn't understand anything. And he said to her, "Well, you shouldn't tell the kids that..." (I realised what he had asked her from his answer...) "You poor thing, you shouldn't live apart from your mama. Are you married? I don't know what she answered. "Well, God is Great, God will enlighten you." I don't remember him saying anything else. Having seen that he told me to leave..." And the girl was kneeling at his feet, with his hands on her head...

"Did he hold her head from both sides, as he often did?"

"Yes, like that. Just like he held us many times, and gave a slap to some, and just held others. At some point he took his hands away and again spoke in Greek to the French girl. "Elder, what does she understand?" I say... "Go on, leave," he said to me.

I left; I went outside. The French girl comes out ... full of enthusiasm: "What doesn't he know!" she said, "He told me everything... He told me everything..."

We hadn't realized it at that moment, neither Tasoula, nor myself. I said to myself, "What does she mean by he told her everything? The Elder spoke in Greek, I heard Greek..."

"Really?"

"And when the French girl left, she left full of enthusiasm, because she went all the way down the stairs, filled with enthusiasm about the event. She believed that he spoke French, because that is what the woman understood. But, I didn't hear what he told her, to move her so much, because from then on, I didn't hear what he said to her exactly..."

The Elder calls me. I go in. "Did you get it?" he said to me. "Elder, what was that? That is, you spoke in Greek and she understood it in French and she spoke in French, and you understood it in Greek..."

"Did you get it? Go on, leave now, leave."

Then after that, naturally, I talked about it and talked about it... they laughed at me, they made fun of me, they enjoyed it, and they listened to me. Until one

at me, they made fun of me, they enjoyed it, and they listened to me. Once, one day the Elder himself told the Abbess at the monastery of St. John at Makrino about the same incident. Then he gave her my telephone number, so that she could call me from the monastery and could also tell her what I heard and saw myself. The woman listened to what I told her in amazement? Do you understand?

Well, can you imagine how I felt from then on! What could I possibly feel! Yes, I said to her, he spoke to her in Greek ...he told her this, this and that ... he spoke to her in Greek and the girl understood ... and she replied in French. But I don't know what she answered in French. I only know what I know from the first conversation, because they had managed to find out that she is a university teacher, that she came as a tourist, that she is an atheist, that was what the lady who accompanied her had said, and I told the Elder all that...

I knew that, but the Elder spoke to her, and I heard his questions and answers, and they were completely different from what I had expected based on what I had learnt. He asked her other things... If she lived alone, if she was married, I don't know what she answered ... the girl, do you understand? However, the French woman knew exactly what had been said between them and was ecstatic because of it.

"You've got it, then? Well, then you can talk about it," the Elder said to me. That's all about the little French girl.

### *B. About the Abbess*

#### *The Reason Why the Event was Mentioned*

Now we must answer a fair question. Why would the Elder relate the incident to this abbess? To show off? Of course not. The reason is deeply spiritual. The Elder loved his spiritual children a great deal, and wanted to cheer them up by telling them about the wonderful actions of Divine Grace. He often recalled the words of Abba Isaac the Syrian, "Beloved, I became a fool, but cannot bear the mystery in silence, but I become absurd for the benefit of the brothers" (Speech 39). Accordingly, in this case he called Abbess Macrina on the phone, as she herself confirmed, full of joy. Full of joy because God's Grace, that cures the sick person, and fills the person who lacks, can do everything; even speak French through that humble and uneducated man. Rather, silently translate his Greek into French, which is essential for the salvation of this soul, which travelled so far searching for the truth.

### *The Account by the Abbess*

However, it is preferable we let the Abbess herself tell us what she knows about it. She wrote the following to us on the 28th September 1994.

about it. She wrote the following to us on the 20th September 1997.

*“Regarding the testimony of Mrs. E.D. that you sent me, I write my own personal testimony, about the event regarding the French woman, Anna. After the event Elder Porphyrios called me full of joy and told me everything that had occurred in conversation between him and that French girl, crying from his happiness. He told me that she had informed him that she was a university teacher of history, that she was an atheist, and that she maintains that God does not exist. Then the Elder said to her, “What university did you learn that at?” He then sent Mrs. E.D. out and they remained alone. After sitting in silence for a short time, while the Elder prayed for her, when he was informed in his heart, he said to her, sobbing in tears, “My little Anna, God loves you. God will speak in your heart.” Then Anna changed immediately. However, because the Elder was crying so much as he related it he told me to phone Mrs. E.D. to tell me about what happened with the French girl and her impressions of the Elder. On the phone with Mrs. E.D. I expressed my amazement.*

*The miracles of Elder Porphyrios towards us were so many, that nothing would seem impossible for our Spirit bearing little father. Simply, Elder Porphyrios used to call me and tell me about similar events, especially when he was either very happy or very sad, mainly concerning young people.*

### *More Incidents with the Abbess*

We also take the opportunity to present a letter that the same Abbess Macrina sent us with two miraculous events. Here is the letter:

Only saints should speak of saints, because only they understand the strange life experiences and the godly actions of those who have “been filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3 19). Elder Porphyrios was certainly filled with all the fullness of God.

We only comprehended the least bit of all the miraculous things that happened each time we had contact with him.

Everybody knows that blessed Elder Porphyrios had a wireless spiritual television and watched all his spiritual children and everyone else that he loved through it. His love really did go through mountains and across seas and as often as he wanted, he found himself amongst us in spirit. Often, in difficult and crucial moments of our life, he intervened by telephone and as though he knew our every need or difficulty, but also our joy and spiritual blessing. He gave solutions to our problems or strengthened us or shared our joy. This intervention, that was so unexpected, apart from surprising us, it also left our souls with joy and comfort. He even knew our thoughts from a distance.

A. In 1986 I was going through a trial with my health and Elder Porphyrios had taken on my tele-therapy! I was in convalescence and the Elder was watching me from a distance as he knew best, and he continually advised me to be careful and not to take risks.

It was the feast of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple (21 November) and we had a vigil. Some spiritual children of Elder Porphyrios were amongst the people. The vigil moved forward. We were at the Thrice- Holy hymn of the Divine Liturgy and all the sisters were chanting together with much enthusiasm for the brightness of the great feast. At the “dynamis” I realised that the base was much too high and that the “immortal” would not come out right... In the wink of an eye, I thought that the sisters would leave me alone. I nearly lost heart, because the little father had told me to be careful while in the choir, and not to be daring. Characteristically he told me, “Don’t try any heroics”. However, a wave of enthusiasm took over my soul and I said, “Dear God, I’m going to sing this to You even if it kills me!” The Grace of the Virgin helped and the Divine Liturgy ended leaving us all in spiritual delight.

Late in the morning, the phone rang and it was the little father. Filled with joy, he told me, “Kid, what was that ‘immortal?’” Naively, I asked, “Did they tell you about it Elder? And he answered in his own characteristic manner, “Kid, don’t you get it? Now then ... nobody told me anything... You sung the ‘Immortal’. The Immortal one came and got rid of death, made you immortal and you didn’t die! But, didn’t I tell you to be careful.”

I was dumbstruck when I realized that the Elder was with us in the vigil and followed everything, even my innermost thoughts. May we have his blessing and may he pray that we be found together with him in heaven.

B. In the vigil for the Entrance of the Theotokos in 1988, the Abbess of the Monastery of Kato Panagia in Arta had come to our monastery together with her sisterhood. The morning, after the vigil, we went, together, to the ordination of His Eminence the Metropolitan of Arta, Ignatios, in Athens. In the afternoon, we visited Elder Porphyrios, so that he could talk to the sisters and so that we could get his blessing.

Father Porphyrios was in an exceptionally good mood and kept us for a long time. He talked to us about prayer of the nous and stressed there is no real prayer of the nous, if there is no real humility, which is acquired through obedience.

Since we had enjoyed plenty of him and the sisters of Kato Panagia monastery had been filled with joy and blessing, I started to rush to leave. It was 7 o’clock. The Elder, however, was in the mood for talking.

“Elder, we must get going, it’s late and we are far away,” I said to him. Yet,

the Elder did not share my concern at all and continued talking. At my insistence, he let us go at twenty to eight. We got his blessing and left most pleased.

As soon as we went downstairs he sent a sister after me, and called me back up to him. He asked, “Did I speak well? Perhaps I was misunderstood?”

“No, Elder, you spoke to us very well, but we must leave as we had a vigil last night, and it is already late. When will we get back to the monastery? (Our monastery is two and a half hours drive away from Milessi).

“Don’t rush, you’ll get back on time,” he told me. He asked me if I knew about the Church of Piraeus Radio Station. Full of joy he “jumped” out of his bed and turned the radio on for me, so that I could hear it. The clock in the room said that it was five to eight. I worked out when we would reach the monastery and we had to get a move on.

Father told me how much good the station would do for people, and he didn’t seem to be at all in a hurry.

“Elder, I must leave, they’ll be worried at the monastery” (I reckoned that we would arrive at about midnight)

“Don’t rush. You’ll get back on time.” He repeated indefinitely. When the clock struck 8 o’clock, he gave me his blessing to leave. However, the driver was extremely cautious and drove very slowly, we also made two stops in between. One for fuel, and another to find a taxi, because a lady who accompanied us had to go to Athens.

However, while all the sisters were worried, because the car was going so slowly, not one of them looked at her watch. We talked about all the wonderful things the Elder had told us, and every now and then, we told the driver to go faster. Yet, he was unruffled and explained that cars get ruined if they are driven fast etc. For this reason, each time we looked, the speed indicator was somewhere between 40 and 60 km an hour. From Megara to the monastery, it went especially slow, because it was a dirt road and he wanted to look after the car.

When we arrived at the monastery all the sisters greeted us with great joy. We told them our “news” and when we went into the refectory I said to the sisters, “Why did you stay up so late, especially after a vigil the night before? Why didn’t you go and rest, how will you ever get up in the morning?”

“We should go to bed this early Mother, what are we chickens?”

“Why? What time is it?” I asked in surprise.

“A quarter to nine”

Naturally, I thought they were joking and I didn’t believe them. When they showed me the clock, I was speechless. From Milessi to Makrino in three-

quarters or an hour, and travelling so slowly! Our wonder and enthusiasm, when we realized what a miracle had taken place, cannot be described. The prayer of Elder Porphyrios had again overcome place and time. God is wondrous in his saints!

The next day, a doctor we know, a spiritual child of the Elder, went to visit him. Then the Elder laughing with joy said to him, "When you are obedient, miracles happen, and the Abbess suddenly finds herself back at her monastery." Of course, he didn't know what the little father meant and only understood the Elder's words when he came to visit us and mentioned the matter.

The next day, when I told Fr. Porphyrios what had happened; he teased me full of love.

May his prayer introduce us into Paradise in the same way. Amen!

Abbess Macrina

### *C. About speaking in tongues. The opinions of biblical interpreters*

The author of the Acts of the Apostles (2: 2-8) writes that on the day of Pentecost, when the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, they started to speak in foreign tongues. Then, the multitude that gathered wondered how each one of them could hear the others speaking in their own mother tongue.

Various explanations have been given in order to explain this phenomenon. Basically; however, one viewpoint says that the diversity of languages was not in what the apostles heard, but came from the mouths of the Apostles who were speaking. Whereas another says that each listener would have heard in his own language regardless of the language the Apostles spoke in. A contemporary non Orthodox theologian writes that a heavenly language could be heard from the lips of the Apostles in such a way that it was immediately translated for each listener into the various languages of humanity. While St. John Chrysostom writes that in contrast to the events at the Tower of Babel, where the one and only language of Mankind was divided into many languages, on the day of Pentecost the opposite happened. The various languages of Mankind acted within one person, and the gift was called the gift of tongues, because that person could speak many languages at the same time. Since we cannot practically conceive of one mouth speaking many languages, there is no other explanation than the single voice that left the Apostle's mouth, reached each person's mind in a different form, i.e. it was translated into their own language.

This is what St. Gregory of Nyssa must mean when he writes in his famous Second Rebuttal. "We should know that the Holy Spirit speaks to us in our own language, as we have also learnt from in the story in Acts, that each man

received the teaching of the disciples in the language that he was born into, understanding the meaning of what was said in words that he knew.” It is even clearer further down, “We read in the Acts that the Divine power divided itself into many languages for this purpose, so that not one of those who spoke another language would lose the benefit.””

This is also the case with Elder Porphyrios, where we also have a kind of charismatic automatic translation. The Greek lady heard Greek, and the French girl French. Just like it is described in Acts, “each hears in his own language in which he was born”.

However, it is preferable that we hear the words of the Elder on the matter, explaining the event to us, as far as it is possible. God’s Providence granted that a relevant conversation, which took place in his hermitage on the 3rd of October 1987 was recorded. We present the transcript here:

*Extract from a Conversation Between the Elder and a Visitor*

Elder: That is, at Pentecost.

Visitor: Also, at Pentecost, as it says, each one heard their own language being spoken.

Elder: Parthians and Medes and Elamites.

Visitor: And those dwelling in Mesopotamia.

Elder: Remind me to have you read it to me.

Visitor: Yes, Elder, of course.

Elder: Because I’ve got my own thing [interpretation] with God’s Grace, of course. I don’t think it is too good, because there it says tongues, and I believe that when the Grace of the Holy Spirit, came “as a rushing mighty wind” and most of all when they went outside and into the square and when the people gathered together and Grace also spilled out onto the people, so, Grace spilled out.

Visitor: And while they spoke in Greek, the others heard in their own language.

Elder: And while, let us say, well, we said that all the people were influenced, those who believed and those who didn’t. Then, all of those, that is, turned to God and all of them ran to be baptized, so then, each one heard in his own language. The Apostle could have said in his own language ... well, he said: “Go to your homes right now” Well, the French man went “la maison”...

Visitor: Indeed.

Elder: He didn’t go “home”.

Visitor: Indeed.



Elder: It's transformed here.

Visitor: Indeed.

Elder: Do you get it?

Visitor: Elder, they...

Elder: Listen up then, ... in some way it is transformed here, the sound was heard in one way, it was received in their brain in another way<sup>[1]</sup>.

Visitor: Indeed.

Elder: I mean, we have that thing where you say, "Aah! I see Sounion<sup>[2]</sup>. Do you get it? I see Sounion.<sup>[3]</sup> Well, I'm looking at Sounion exactly as it is, I even see the lighthouse there, that you don't see ... all of it, without eyes<sup>[4]</sup>

Visitor: Indeed.

Elder: Well, that's the way they went... the sound hit here [the ears] but inside [in the brain], with God's enlightenment, they understood what that sound said. It said, "Go to your homes." But the person speaking said, "Mmm..." Well, his own language ...I don't know ... Well, and we have my own example, where you saw [Sounion] and I saw it better [without eyes].

Visitor: Yes, of course...

Elder: And when so-and-so said that there's also a lighthouse there, I glanced at her, even though I saw it... What do you make of that?

Visitor: Elder, if you'll allow me to...

Elder: That is, that sound [was understood in each person's own language].

Visitor: That's very impressive, because if I read you that passage, the exact one from the Acts of the Apostles, it shows that at the very moment that Peter spoke to the crowd, thousands of people heard in their own tongue, that's what the actual text says. How was it possible then... for him to say one word and also say it in fifteen or twenty languages, for each word, for each particular word?

That shows that precisely your own interpretation is the correct one... on that matter. Not one interpreter has grasped the meaning of this matter. They don't mention anything about it...

Elder: No, they shouldn't mention it... they must say it like that, because they are afraid...

Visitor: Not one interpreter mentions a thing about it.

Elder: Did you hear what I just said?

Visitor: You said that they must say it like that because they are afraid.

Elder: "And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven."

Visitor: I've talked about it with others, with Michael and the late Panagopoulos had that opinion, that the Grace of God ... that while Peter was speaking in Hebrew [it was translated in the minds of the audience, into the

language of each person].

Elder: Yes, but didn't the Fathers know about it? They knew about it, but they wrote about it, as it is written there, because it is amazing. Do you get it? They are afraid, they are afraid to touch it. Like in the Revelation where John has some curses and things like that... They don't bother it. Leave it there, as each person understands it. They haven't explained it...

\*

Here ends the Elder's brief conversation about the subject.

It is worth noting the following, which someone who knew the Elder told us:

Once he was leaving for abroad, and he had not managed to get the Elder's advice about this in time. However, he called in from the airport in order to get his blessing, and the Elder said to him, "Be careful!" without telling him what to be careful about. However, this person "saw" clearly in his mind's eye the person who he was meant to be careful of. It was a person who did not have good intentions towards him. He also "saw" what he was to be careful of and answered, "Yes, Elder, I understand." Indeed, when he met this person, he was prepared and dealt with him in an appropriate manner. Thus, the Elder made the person he was speaking with a participant in his clairvoyance, without words. Having such an experience, then, he is a credible interpreter of the aforementioned events, mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles.

End of Supplement

<sup>[1]</sup> Publisher's note: That is to say the sound does not change, even though we say that it was heard in many languages, because it was heard noetically, or within the mind with the perceptive discernment (clairvoyance) that was given to the Apostles' audience temporarily, and now to the French woman

<sup>[2]</sup> A place on the sea-shore not far from Athens. [*Translator*].

<sup>[3]</sup> Publisher's note: i.e. "You see with your physical eyes."

<sup>[4]</sup> Publisher's note: i.e. "I see by clairvoyance, spiritual perceptiveness"

## 9. GIFT OF HEALING

### *The Elder's Experience of Sickness*

#### *His First Illness*

The Elder had an especially well-developed gift of healing that he received from above. When I first met him one question kept whizzing around in my head: How could this Athonite, this father from the Holy Mountain, be found living in Athens? He, “knowing my thoughts” said to me one day: “You’ll probably ask me: How I, a monk from the Holy Mountain, am in Athens? You know, when I was just a young monk, my Elders sent me to do various chores outside our hut. One of those was collecting snails. I put them inside a sack and carried them on my back. Snails have the tendency to produce a kind of slime. This slime went through the sack; it went through my clothing and reached my flesh. Then as the North Wind blew, I caught a cold, and became very sick. The Elder’s sent me back into the world to get well, but when I went back to the Holy Mountain I got sick again. Then they said: “Maybe God wants you in the world? They were informed in their hearts that this was the case. So I went back into the world.”

#### *His Final Illness*

God, with his unfathomable will, linked the salvation of the Elder and his thousands of spiritual children with his sicknesses and the need for cure. In time, his sicknesses multiplied and became his measure of virtue. One day, when I found him in great pain upon his bed, I felt sorry for him and the following conversation ensued:

“Are you in pain, Elder?”

“A lot of pain?”

“Where does it hurt?”

“Everywhere.”

“What’s the matter with you Elder?”

“What isn’t the matter with me? I have so many conditions, I don’t even know what I’ve got. My life hangs on a piece of thread.”

God held that thread and it was not cut for decades, more for our sake, rather than the Elder’s. He was ready to leave, but we were not prepared because of our negligence and we needed him very much.

The Elder knew this and fought to stay alive, with his prayer and concern, which were accompanied by the vigilant attention of the monastery sisters, as well as the prayers of hundreds of spiritual children of his. He once said, “I have often set off for heaven, but all your prayers brought me back.” A long battle took place, together with the operation on his kidney, his serious heart attack, and the failed operation on his cataract, just to mention a few of the adventures he had with his health.

In his last trial, with his eye, the doctors had written him off. His stomach had internal bleeding and, for many days, he was a malnourished and tormented body that had become a skeleton covered with skin. They held him upright so that he would not lie down and do more damage. He was held up like a crucifix, in dreadful pain.

### *His Prayer for Cancer*

When he had recovered somewhat and began to receive visitors, I met him. I was amazed to hear him say, in his sick voice, “When I was young, you know, I prayed to God, that if He ever allowed me to get sick, that He would give me cancer. You know, cancer is the best sickness. Because, with other sicknesses you don’t take the matter seriously, you hope that you’ll get well, and you usually don’t change. But with cancer you say, well this is as far as it goes; the lies have ended. Now I’m going.” People cannot help you and you find yourself alone before God, your only hope now is in God, grab onto that hope, and you are saved. With the operation on my eye that failed, and with the cortisone that they gave me, I hurt so much, I felt like an explosion had taken place in my skull and shattered it to pieces! I thought that God had heard that old prayer of mine, that it was cancer, but it wasn’t. You know I had stopped saying that prayer for cancer, after mentioning it to a bishop once. He told me off, because, as he said, prayers like that harbours selfishness. Well then, I was in deep pain. It was wonderful.” While his entire narration held me in awe, the last part: “I was in deep pain. It was wonderful,” left me speechless. I was often unable to keep up

with the Elder.

### *Forthright Prayer Heals*

On another occasion, he helped me comprehend it a little, with these words of his: “When you are sick, do you know what you should do? You should implore God to forgive your sins. Then God, since you are imploring him in pain, and with humility, will forgive your sins and will make your body well too. But be careful: Don’t pray with hidden intentions, don’t say “Dear God, forgive my sins” and your mind is stuck on your bodily sickness. A prayer like that won’t get results. When you pray forget your bodily sickness, accept it like a prayer rule, like a penance, for the forgiveness of your sins. Don’t worry about what is beyond that, leave it to God, and God knows his work.”

With those simple words the Elder explained that sickness of the body is due to sickness of the soul, i.e. my sins, and that forgiveness of sins by God, through humble prayer, brings the healing of the soul, and in a time when God sees fit, the healing of the body too. However, he also drew my attention to the truthful directness of a prayer that seeks remission of sins. This is because completely wiping out the cause is everything for cure from illness.

In contrast, prayer with ulterior motives, where the sick person uses forgiveness of sins as an excuse in order to achieve the cure of his bodily sickness alone, cancels out the expected results, because of the selfishness of the sick person.

The Elder’s position was this: responding to the humble request of the sick person for the remission of his sins and to his forthright faith, Christ, in His great mercy, first does the more difficult thing and then moves on, in the time that He chooses, to the easier thing. First he cures the root, the sickness of the soul, sin, and then he cures the branches, the sickness of the body.

### *Sickness as Ascetic Practice*

Even though sick in body, the Elder was in essence healthy, because he was healthy in soul. That health of soul made him able to support, from his bed of pain, hundreds of physically healthy people, who felt themselves suffering from the spiritual sickness of sin. Not only did he bear his physical illness praying for the remission of sins and giving glory to God, but also he used it as a means of effective ascetic practice. One day, when he was in intense pain from his various sicknesses I asked, “How are you doing, Elder?” He answered using the exact words of St. Paul: “I am disciplining my body” (1 Cor. 9:27). Like the holy

ascetics, by the Grace of God, he transformed his involuntary bodily sickness to voluntary spiritual exercise.

### *The Heart Attack*

It was an August afternoon in 1978. There were four of us, all friends, waiting in the Elder's yard to see him. Two of these friends would be seeing him for the first time and were especially moved. A crowd of people was waiting, and time was moving on. The Elder had been seeing people from the day before and was tired from a journey. We thought about leaving, so that at least we wouldn't tire him out. However, the two friends could not miss the opportunity to meet him, given that it was difficult to get to see the Elder at that time.

We decided to wait together with the other people. The Elder saw people without a break. Our turn came late at night. When I went into his cell, I was astonished. I had expected to find him exhausted. Instead he was relaxed and in a good mood. His face looked like the rosy face of an infant that has just woken up after a long sleep. I had never seen him like that before. The thing that surprised me the most, however, was a strange light that surrounded him completely, especially around his head. His cell was dimly lit by one candle and it was embraced by shadows that danced as the candle flame flickered. Everything was in darkness, except for the Elder who was covered in light. It was the first time I had ever seen such a light, that I would call, incorporeal and uncreated, in that it did not look like any sort of natural or artificial light and it did not follow the laws of shadow. It was not light that lit the Elder up from the outside, like the candle, but it flowed out from within him. I did not say anything about that light to him, because "fear and ecstasy" overcame me. The Elder was full of affectionate and caring love again. Once again, he put my soul at ease, with his comforting advice. My other friends also saw him, but did not mention the joyful and otherworldly light. I was worried. Maybe it was a false sensation of my own, even though my embedded rationalism and disbelief did not leave scope for such an interpretation. I had never had a false sensation in my life, why should I have one now, and, indeed, with the Elder, whose life unravelled like a chain of metaphysical events? We headed back home through the forest. Suddenly a forceful wind blew up, which was unusual for the time of year. It wailed through the pine-trees and bent their branches right down. I felt a strong chill right through my body. The chill stayed with me all the way to Athens. We went to the car in the clearing, which spreads out after the forest. We got home very late.

In the morning, the news reached us like a lightening bolt: That night, the Elder had had a heart attack. The news shocked me. I was distressed about the Elder's latest trial. I was also distressed for the people who had such great need

Elder's latest trial. I was also distressed for the people who had such great need of him and who would no longer be able to visit him in his cell for an undetermined amount of time. Regarding myself, I felt some sort of personal guilt, because I was one of those who had tired him out the previous evening. I could not do anything, other than pray to Christ persistently, to have mercy on the Elder and on all of us, and to give him to us for many more years. I later learnt that many people spontaneously prayed together for his health during those days.

On the eve of his attack, a spiritual child of his had unexpectedly arrived in Athens from the provinces. He awoke earlier than usual the next day and had a strange, intense desire to see the Elder, he told me. He set off in his car, in the dark, before daybreak, for Kallisia. As soon as he got to the forest, he saw the Elder. They were carrying him, in a critical state, by donkey. He picked him up immediately, and took him to the hospital by car. Christ felt sorry for us, and gave him to us for thirteen more years.

Some time later, I was able to meet him at a house of a friends of his, where he was gradually recovering, hidden away from people. The first thing I did was say sorry, because, although I had not intended it, I had also tired him out that night. The second thing I did was to complain a little because, even though he still was not feeling well, he still continued to see people without a break. The Elder said to me, "When judges get tired they stop their work for lunch. Of course, it was also the over- exhaustion that I suffered, but I felt sorry for the people who were waiting outside for so many hours." He had literally applied himself to the duty of love. He saw that I was very sad, oppressed by feelings of guilt and tried to comfort me saying, "Don't worry. It was bound to happen. Be careful. Excessive sadness and worry are not from God, they are a trap from the devil." That meeting of ours was very brief. I took care to leave quickly so that I wouldn't be the cause of a relapse.

Some months later, I was able to make another visit. Again, it was brief. The Elder was recovering more and more. Amongst other things he said: "I must be very careful because that wretched illness could suddenly drop me on the spot." He immediately corrected himself, "Even though there are no wretched illnesses, because God allows them all." He finished our conversation by saying: "The illness has tired me. So many months closed in, in one room. I really long for the open air and the trees. Say a prayer for me too." It seemed like a childish, light complaint, and nostalgia, that is justified, even for saints.

Some time later, I was informed that the Elder said to a spiritual child of his, "I had a heart attack that night because I couldn't stand all that light."

## *The Cataract*

A few years later, his great escapade with cataract surgery came. It failed, and together with postoperative complications, his system was upset. We all prayed and feared that the end had come. Even the doctors had given up hope. Despite that, some insisted on believing in a miracle cure and we tried to pass on that hope to those who were discouraged. I remember I did something then, that many friends considered a tragic irony. While the Elder was completely worn out from malnourishment and from his bleeding stomach so much so that he could not even drink a tiny spoonful of milk, I gave him a cooking pot that had just come out on the market. It could be used for both frying and baking. A sister from the monastery took the pot to the Elder in his brick cell. I waited anxiously. At some point the sister came out and said: "The Elder thanks you for the gift, and he told me to tell you that he will use your pot." When I heard that I was filled with enthusiasm. I turned to my friends around me and said: "You guys, the Elder's going to live. The Elder never says anything without importance. Saying that he'll use it means that he'll get well and eat that sort of food." He really did use it, not long afterwards.

Later, when he started to regain his strength and to gradually receive visitors, I was able to speak with him for a while. Amongst other things I asked, "Elder, how did you let them perform that surgery, that proved to be so dangerous, upon you?" He answered in his usual unaffected manner, "Well, kid, I don't even know how I agreed. I was a bit relaxed those days, and I said, let's do my doctor a favour, because he wants to give the sight back to my bad eye. That cortisone they gave me was a lot to blame. As much as I fought against cortisone in others, it fought against me in this sickness of mine."<sup>u</sup>

## *The Hernia*

As soon as the Elder recovered from that escapade another one found him: the deterioration of his hernia condition. He was frequently in pain, and the sisters stayed up all night at his bedside. The general state of his health did not allow for surgery. His hernia often came out, and the condition became tragic, until it was back in place again. I once asked him, "Why don't you wear a truss?" The Elder replied, "I can't put one on, because the truss will put pressure on the arteries of my thighs and the necessary blood will not go down to my feet, and then we'll have yet more trouble."

## *Two Spiritual Fathers are Both Sick*



The Elder had become a physician both to himself, and to a wealth of other people. First of all, I'll mention my own spiritual father. From the very first time I had met Fr. Porphyrios my spiritual father had asked that I kiss the Elder's hand on his behalf, and to ask him if he had any message to pass on, each time I visited him. I always did that. Fr. Porphyrios was pleased with my spiritual father's regards, and always received them with a cheerful smile. He gave his blessing, if he had a certain spiritual message for me he would say it and he always gave me exact instructions about the preservation of his health. After my spiritual father's first operation on his stomach, he frequently stressed: "Tell him to take care of his diet, his medicine, and his necessary rest, very well. He shouldn't be carried away by the needs of others, because most just consider their own problems, without being concerned about putting pressure on the other person who is sick. Tell him not to overdo it, by offering his services at the loss of his health. God saved him from great danger". My spiritual father was surprised when he heard all that, and said to me with a smile, "But I'm well now, why should I be so careful about my health?" Elder Porphyrios knew why, but he did not reveal it, even to my spiritual father himself, and certainly not to me.

Not many years passed when my spiritual father had a relapse. He needed another operation, but his health was deteriorating continually. He was in unbearable pain, he didn't eat a thing, and he was kept alive with an intravenous drip. He melted like a candle, day by day. On one of my last visits to the house where my spiritual father lived, he said to me, in a fading voice: "Tell Fr. Porphyrios that I am in great pain, and that I ask him on my knees to pray for me, and if it is God's will that I may live, let him make me into a gift for my spiritual children, but if it is His will to take me, let him take me. May His name be blessed."

I passed his message on to Fr. Porphyrios, and he was overcome with emotion when he heard it. He asked me to dial my spiritual father's telephone number immediately. Then there a moving conversation followed, between my spiritual father, who had one foot in the grave, and Fr. Porphyrios, who had reached that point, three times in the past. Fr. Porphyrios encouraged him, mentioning the details from similar experiences of his own. My spiritual father could just about give one-word answers, through his terrible pain. The "professor" of life in the Holy Spirit, who had been crucified often, supported the "teacher" in the most difficult hours of his cross. Fr. Porphyrios left the telephone open and I heard the whole conversation, kneeling and in tears.

When it had finished, Fr. Porphyrios turned to me and said, "What a miracle that was? Your spiritual father was next to me. Did you see him?"

"No, Elder," I answered, "I didn't see him." Then Fr. Porphyrios continued,

“It is a great miracle. The bodies far apart, but the souls together! I phone him a lot, both day and night, especially when I see that he is in a lot of pain.” We agreed to pray together at the same time. I want to talk to him when he is in a lot of pain. That helps a lot. But visitors tire him out, both him and me. I identify with him a lot. I’ve gone through the same thing. It’s a good thing that they didn’t open him up. Let them leave him like that, as long as God keeps him.” In disappointed hope I asked, “Elder, if God wants, even now, can’t a miracle happen so that he lives?” The Elder replied, “If God wants it, anything can happen.” However, God did not want it, rather, He wanted to do otherwise, from the complete wisdom of His love. In a few days, He took him up to heaven.

Broken, following his demise, I went to Fr. Porphyrios. I no longer had a message from my spiritual father to take to him. I bent over and kissed his hand, wetting it with my tears. I silently rested my head upon it and started to pray secretly for the repose of his holy soul. The Elder was silent. When the Elder finished his own prayer I heard him whisper, “He lived Christ; he went to Christ.” I lifted my head up and asked, “Who, Elder?” The Elder did not speak I realised who he meant. I complained, “Elder, why didn’t God work his miracle, and grant us a few more years. He left so young.” The Elder replied, “God did work His miracle.”

“How did he do it?” I asked, “since He took him away?” Then the Elder said, “He should have left after the first operation, but God enlightened me, not to allow him to undergo chemotherapy, because he would have died then. God granted him to us for another eight years. Wasn’t it a miracle that he lived for another eight years and celebrated the liturgy, confessed, spoke, and wrote about important Church matters, he visited the sick and helped many people?” Indeed, as it turned out, it was a great miracle of God’s love.

### *The Elder as My Doctor*

#### *The First Diagnosis*

I was amongst those who managed have the Elder as their “personal doctor”, despite my unworthiness. From our first meeting, the Elder had carried out a brief medical diagnosis on me, by holding my hand, and taking my pulse. “I see that you have health problems,” he said. “They are problems with the nerves - circulation.” The Elder summarised my health in those words. The problems that the doctors had uncovered up until then were mainly in relation to the sensitivity of the nervous system and poor blood circulation. The Elder was most precise. His articulation of “problems with nerves - circulation” was not a chance expression, because he presented the particular problems in a united form. In actual fact, as later medical examination proved, the nervous system was

involved with the circulation problem, and affected it, and vice versa.

For some period, I had intensely troublesome migraine headaches and dizziness. I mentioned it to the Elder, and he said to me, “I see that the fine brain vessels are not watering the cells well. Something is happening with the osteophyte<sup>[2]</sup>, with the ear. I can’t tell you any more, because you won’t understand me, because the functions in there are very complicated”

Some months later, I informed him that I had seen an Ear-Nose-Throat specialist, who told me that I had a problem with osteophytes and I did not have good cell irrigation in the ear labyrinth. This was the reason for the migraines and dizziness. The Elder was pleased and said to me, “Do you see how I found it, kid? I didn’t tell you about it scientifically, by saying, “irrigation”, I told you about it simply, by saying, “watering”.

#### Stopping the Inappropriate Medicine

In the past my doctor had given me a relevant medicine, and told me to take it without fail. The Elder, who generally did not like medicine and who, despite that, respected the doctors and accepted his medicine as a necessary evil, fell silent. He seemed to be deeply thoughtful and in prayer. At some point he said to me, “Stop that medicine, kid.” I wondered about his unexpected instruction, but I decided to be obedient, and put it into practice. I stopped taking the medicine.

Some time passed, the affects continued and detailed lab examinations had to be made. I got my spiritual father’s blessing to show the results to another fine doctor, who was a spiritual child of his. After a careful check up, in a spirit of prayer, the young doctor declared that in my case the medicine that I had recently stopped taking, after years of use, was not necessary. He recommended another drug, which I took. Then I remembered the Elder. The next time I was with him, I mentioned the matter to him. He said, “What do you know? You stopped taking that medicine, did you? See, how science agrees with me. I’m not a doctor, I don’t know how, but the moment you told me about that medicine, I saw that you ought to stop taking it. I told you it, just like it came to me. You did well to stop it. Only now, you have to fill your soul with Christ, with Divine Eros, with joy. Christ’s joy will make you well. When you are very tired, take some medicine, for the sake of your weakness. We should have a general confession, to heal the secret wounds of your soul. It will bring great joy both to you and to me. Now, I am ill, God will accommodate another meeting between us. His words made an impression on me, especially: “Christ’s joy will make you well.” It was the first time that I had heard such a cheerful prospect of cure. It was not one of the known cures, but a cure for both the body and soul.

#### *Dizziness and the Soul*

Dizziness came to me suddenly, at an undefined time. It was quite a nuisance, and created a more general problem with balance, mainly when walking. I tried to evaluate it within me. A question arose from this. I asked the Elder about it at our next meeting. "Elder," I said, "I keep asking myself, what is happening to me. Is it one thing or the other? Is it really buzzing in the ear, which creates a psychological problem of balance? Or is it from the psychological problem, the worry that I might become faint, making an automatic suggestion, which creates real dizziness?" The Elder answered with a smile, "I see that you go very deep down. The thing is confused." I understood, from his answer, that one part of the question was mixed up with the other, and it was possible that both things could be happening. That is, the physical problem affects the psychological one and vice-versa. It was clear, with the doctor's help, and the Elder's, I need to be inactive, but to act at the same time. This, in order to strengthen my position on the physical front, with the suggested medical treatment and on the psychological one, with greater faith in God's Providence. The results of my co-ordinated effort, mainly through the prayers and instructions of the Elder, on this particular matter, were impressively good. In a few months, I managed to achieve the improvement I had not been able to in years before. I owed a debt of gratitude to Christ, through the Elder. However, my general health problems remained.

### *The Prediction of the Stroke*

Years flew past. Once, on a visit to the Elder, we were talking about various matters, when I suddenly saw him bend over, hold my head in his hands, and make the sign of the cross over me, continuously, whispering, "It's on the left, I see it is on the left." The Elder had carried out a "spiritual brain-scan". He did not give me an explanation. Rather, he gave me advice about what I should be careful of in order to protect my health. The truth is that I did not take the Elder's prediction seriously. My great mistake was that I continued in my spiritual underdevelopment, with selfish negligence. From that, I could not comprehend the height of the Elder's spirituality in its actual dimension. So, I either lost him in the clouds of incomprehension or, I pulled him down to the level of my own infancy. The result was that I did not make use of the priceless opportunities that they offered to me.

A few days after the Elder's advice, I had to work from evening until night, non-stop, for a whole day, with a severe headache. Certainly, it was not the first time that I had worked under similar conditions. However, I now had particular warning signs. At around six o' clock in the evening I had a constant numbness

in the toes of my right foot. I wanted to believe that it was something that would pass. I took a few steps, but the numbness remained. Nevertheless, I was patient until I had finished my work. A feeling of misplaced dignity and self-sacrifice kept me fixed there and it did not allow me humbly to say that it was impossible for me to continue. Nor, did it allow me, for greater assurance, to say that I really was sick that day.

When I arrived home the numbness had extended to the fingers of my right hand too. I phoned a doctor friend and described my symptoms to him. He advised a specific course of medical treatment, and rest, because he did not see anything serious, for the moment. Then I remembered the Elder. I really did want to phone him, but I was reluctant. I thought, "Will he be in his cell? And if so, perhaps he is sick, a crowd of visitors is keeping him busy, or one phone call after another?" I put my reluctance aside, with the thought that God would sort everything out, not a human being. I crossed myself, and dialled the number. I could hear the Elder's voice immediately. In times of need, I always found him, or he always found me. I told him about the situation in brief. He asked me if I was disturbed in various other parts of the body and he finished off by saying, "Don't be scared, it's nothing serious. Go to the hospital." I informed the doctor of the Elder's concise opinion and recommendation. He agreed unquestioningly with the view of the spiritual doctor.

I was soon at the Evangelismos General Hospital in central Athens. I was concerned about my unprepared soul. On a visit to my spiritual father I said, "I pray to God, for him to give me a few more years life, so that I will repent." He answered, "Years are not needed, repentance is like lighting." Tests and treatment took place, in order to waylay the symptoms of the light stroke. A bearable, fluctuating numbness lingered on the right hand side of my body. That meant that the stroke occurred in the left half of my brain, according to the crosswise dependence of the peripheral nerves on the central nervous system. So, the Elder's prediction was completely true. Quite a while before he had seen a problem on the left side of the head. The doctor later confirmed that the sensory nerve had been affected, in part, whereas the motor nerve was untouched. Also, the Elder's "medical" opinion after the attack, regarding the minor extent of the problem, was also confirmed. I gave thanks to God, for limiting my trial. However, I was tormented by feelings of guilt, because I felt responsible for that illness.

In my first meeting with Elder Porphyrios, after leaving hospital, I mentioned it to him. He told me about the cause in parables. "You know, when judges get tired, they take a break at midday. Some time ago a spiritual daughter of mine was hit in her car, and was still very faint. She called me on Sunday morning. I

advised her not to go to Church, but to stay at home and rest. She didn't listen to me. She went, she fell down in the street, and they took her to the Evangelismos hospital." I got the message. His example was most clear. Seeing that I was unhappy and feeling guilty, he added, "Don't be sad. Rather, be happy, and thank God, because it could have been a lot worse. What you went through was tiny, hardly anything. You shouldn't even talk about it. God felt sorry for you."

At our next meeting he gave me detailed instructions, like a caring father to his child, "Be careful with your diet. Don't eat food that bothers your condition and makes you fat. Don't spend too long in bed, because you'll get sick again. Move around, take exercise, but in moderation. You should go for walks, but neither too quickly nor too slowly, not uphill and downhill, or very high up, or very low down. Walk with a regular pace, in an even place, without tiring yourself out. You should get out. I'm not going to tell you where you should go. Go to places you like, just as long as they are outside of Athens, far away from the pollution, that damages your health. Don't go out when it's very cold, or very hot. When you go out in the cold, hold a handkerchief in front of your nose and mouth, so that you won't breathe in cold air. Wear a hat in the heat, so the sun won't affect your head. Be very careful about the stress and anxiety that you feel at work. I know that they don't put pressure on you there, and you appear calm on the outside. Still, you put pressure on yourself internally, so that you won't fall behind the others and so that you can produce more and better work. Do you see now, that you've taken sick leave and have been away from work for quite a few days how calm you are inside? When you do any other kind of work, don't be anxious. Read books by the Church Fathers, and pray. First and foremost, do not get upset. In this way, your health will get better. The more you love Christ, the happier you'll be, and the less upset you'll be. You'll do everything with love and thanks, without anxiety and stress. Take your medicine, perhaps you'll be able to throw that away too someday."

### *The Prediction of My Heart Attack*

I don't know how much I kept to, and how much I strayed from, that wise advice of the Elder, that was tailored to my intrinsic and acquired character, my illnesses and my prospects. Four years had passed since then. My visits to his cell continued as usual. Then, one afternoon, he called me on the phone at home and advised me to go to a cardiologist at once. I was worried, but not especially so, because I had recently undergone a cardiogram, and it was normal. I went to a friend who was a cardiologist. I had often talked to him about the Elder and he very much wanted to meet him. He took a cardiogram. My friend was puzzled by my sudden irregularity. When I told him, with a smile, that I had a "referral"

by my sudden irregularity. When I told him, with a smile, that I had a referral from Fr. Porphyrios, he rushed to put the appropriate wires on me. The cardiogram made a recording, without showing anything pathologically wrong. The cardiologist said that Fr. Porphyrios was worried about me without cause. But before he could finish what he was saying, I heard him raise his voice and say, "Yet, I do see something." It was something called nodal tachycardia. I had to take heart medicine for the first time. The Elder's "spiritual cardiogram" caught the problem from a distance. I visited him in his cell and told him about the results of the examination. He was thoughtful, and gave me new advice of a cardiological nature this time.

A few days later, symptoms of angina appeared. Entering the day of the Holy Spirit<sup>[3]</sup>, at two o'clock in the morning, I was awoken by intense pain in the chest, the back and the arms. They took me to hospital, where the cardiogram, strangely, did not indicate that anything was wrong. The duty doctor thought it was to do with nerves, and recommended sedatives.

I returned home. The pain lingered, despite the sedatives. Some hours later I went to the hospital again. Now the cardiogram was positive. It showed that I had an acute myocardial infarction. I was in intensive care for quite a few days. Two doctors stressed that when I went home that evening, with a heart attack in progress, and essentially without medical assistance, I had been in grave danger of dying. Again, I had underestimated the magnitude of risk that the Elder had pointed out in good time. Yet again, through his prayers, God was compassionate and gave me time to repent.

I remember that during those days in hospital I was transformed. Worldly things did not interest me at all. I even found my small earthly joys abhorrent. I wondered how so many patients had the courage to waste their time carelessly on pointless interests, while the hour of death and eternal judgement of each and every one was imminent. I had also consciously realized that those considered healthy did not really differ, in essence, from those who were seriously ill. Even if they were able to secure a further hundred years of life for themselves, in the face of the eternity approaching for everyone, it would be like a few seconds.

How could they willingly blind themselves to this shocking reality? How could they go on with a soul unprepared? How could I? For this reason, the only thing I wanted to do during those days was to pray without ceasing, to say, "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me" which was soon changed to "Lord Jesus Christ, forgive me." Only those words put my soul at ease. So, without even having realised it, I had put Fr. Porphyrios's teaching into practice: "When you are sick, you should implore God to forgive your sins." I had forgotten that teaching. However, the Elder remembered it, and brought it back to my lips again at a suitable moment. Then I understood how far and how deep he saw. I

again, at a sacred moment. Then I understood how far and how deep he saw. I understood how correct he was. He always watched over me, and strengthened me, with his spiritual “television” open. It is strange, but now, when I am lukewarm spiritually, I reminisce about those hours of critical danger and the remembrance of death. They made me feel an intense spiritual resurrection and untroubled tranquillity of soul. This hallowed paradox was not my own doing, but that of Christ’s Love, through the prayers of Elder Porphyrios.

When my time in hospital was over, I went home. There, in a short while, I noted another unexpected blessing from God, through my sickness. The sickness became a protecting shield that kept me from a soul-destroying and health threatening involvement in problems that materialised in my path, in the meantime.

### *I Wondered What was the Matter with You*

The Elder always took care of my health. He was concerned about me even when I was far away from him. He put what he had told me into practice, “What a miracle from God! The bodies apart, the souls together! A new health problem had turned up for me. I went through terrifying nights, which were brought on, not only by physical discomfort, but trials of the soul, too. In my visit to the Elder following this, as soon as I went into his cell, he beat me to it, saying: “Now tell me, what’s the matter with your health?” When I started to tell him what was bothering me he cut me short saying, “So, it’s that then, is it? And I was asking myself for so many nights, what was the matter with you, what was the matter with you?” The Elder’s spiritual “television” did not switch off, even at night.

### *Medicine*

He did not rule out the use of medicine, but did not give it absolute value regarding its healing role. One day he asked me, “What is “medicine” (*pharmako*)?” I answered, “A chemical preparation that we take in order to get well from sicknesses.” He was not satisfied with my answer and repeated, “Tell me what “medicine” (*pharmako*) means? Doesn’t the word itself tell you something?” The Elder continued, “Medicine (*pharmako*) means “poison” (*pharmaki*)<sup>[4]</sup>. Don’t think that medicine only makes the human body better. They also make it worse. Why do we take medicine? Because we get sick. And why do we get sick? Because we get upset. And why do we get upset? Because we sin. If, however, we let Christ dwell throughout our soul, then sin leaves, sadness leaves, sickness leaves and we throw our medicine away.” The Elder’s analysis



was enjoyable in its simplicity and wise in its revelation. Like a spiritual drilling machine, it went from the surface to the furthest depths to find the successive causes of serious events: Of taking medicine, of sickness, of sadness, of sin, of absence of Christ in our souls. This analysis also helped me to better understand the assurance of St. Paul the Apostle about all those who “let Christ dwell throughout their souls”, that they are “troubled on every side, yet not distressed.”

On another occasion, he said, “When we get sick, we should follow the guidance of medicine and reason, in order to avoid mistakes. Above all, however, we should follow the will of God and we should have trust in His love.” The Elder always knew how to harmonise the high calling of the human being with his material needs.

## *The Elder as Doctor of the People*

### *The Cancer Patient Who Became Well Without an Operation*

The Elder made diagnoses, watched over, and cured the sicknesses of many spiritual children of his, as well as many people who were strangers to him. Many of them would never know of this, only to find out in the heavens.

One summer afternoon, we were sitting on the benches outside the Elder’s cell at Kallisia. We were waiting for him to arrive, but he did not finally appear. However, the time we spent waiting was not at all boring. We had a little chat session, and everyone said something about their own experience with the Elder, who was absent in body, but present in spirit, gladdening our souls. At some point I spoke, and told them that the Elder also healed sick people. An unfamiliar lady who sat next to me, asked, “Serious illnesses?”

“What serious illnesses are you talking about?” I said to her, “He’s even cured terminal cancer with his prayers, as I have been reliably informed.” The lady looked at me intently and smiled. “Excuse me, madam,” I said, “but why are you smiling? Do you think I’m telling you fairy-tales?”

“Not at all,” she replied, “because I’m the person that the Elder cured of terminal cancer through his prayers” We were all struck dumb. “It’s you?” we all said with one voice. The lady hesitated to speak, but bowed to our insistence, on the understanding that we did not make her name known.

“I was struck down by cancer,” she started to tell us. -It spread and was all over my body. I was treated in several hospitals, but my situation became continually worse. I was in terrible pain. I was unable to eat and I had become skin and bone. The doctors had written me off. Some relatives of mine took me to London. They couldn’t do anything for me there, either. They sent me back, to

die in my own country, at least. They took me to the Polyclinic Hospital. I was totally exhausted and without hope. There, a lady I knew told me about a hieromonk who was in the hospital chapel of St. Gerasimos and worked miracles. I did not believe in miracles, I was not really a churchgoer, so I didn't think too much of it. One day a white-haired old man visited me and told me, with love, not to be upset, but that we would pray to Christ and I would get well. It all seemed unbelievable. However, something changed within my soul at that hour. I asked him what he was called, and he said, "Fr. Porphyrios".

When he left, I timidly tried to pray to Christ and I felt some relief. He came again, another day, and told me that the cancer would spread to the bones, but not to be distressed, only to pray continually, and I would get well. I felt that this man had some kind of power in him, which he transmitted. I started to pray continually, to believe, to hope and to be glad for the first time. A few days later the doctors discovered cancer in my bones. I smiled, and the doctors thought that the cancer had affected my mind, too. From then on, the cancer started to go away, little by little. The doctors recognised this too, but they could not explain it. I knew the reason why, but I didn't tell them. The improvement continued, until I was able to get up from my bed. My contact with Fr. Porphyrios continued. I came up here, to Kallisia. One day, I was here, in the yard, waiting with some relatives of mine. The Elder sent a lady to tell me to go to his cell. I went, and he asked me how I was doing. I told him that I was getting better all the time. Then he told me to go out into the garden and to find two strawberries and bring them to him. I went out, I looked, I found them, and I took them to him. Fr. Porphyrios prayed, blessed them, and gave me one to eat. As soon as I bit it, I gave out a loud scream, which my relatives outside heard."

"Why did you shout like that?" I asked in wonder, interrupting her account.

"I shouted," she answered, "because I couldn't do otherwise. Because, as soon as I bit the strawberry, I felt that my whole being was filled with such sweetness, such indescribable happiness, that I had never ever felt before then. It was my ultimate cure from cancer. From that moment on, it never affected me again. It only left a swelling on my left arm, as you can see. Fr. Porphyrios told me that it is the mark of Christ's love, so that I wouldn't forget His favour and so that I would love Him."

We were all deeply impressed by the lady's story, a true story. It was so miraculous; it sounded like a fairy tale. On our way back through the small forest, the lady was most agile, talkative and pleasant, so much so, that you could not even imagine the burning ordeal that she had gone through and come out of in one piece. This, by God's Grace and through the prayers of Fr. Porphyrios. As for us, we did not complain about the Elder's absence. We

replaced it with the above, the appearance of the lady who was an ex-cancer patient.

### *The Devil and Illness*

I was in the Elder's cell at Kallisia. We talked about matters of health and he tried to make clear to me that illness was due to demonic activities, to sins.

To help me understand this, he told me about the following incident, "A lady who was in complete despair visited me at my cell. She was in danger of dying because of her sorrow. The reason was her husband who suffered terribly from asthma, as she told me, and she felt sorry for him, but couldn't do anything to help, and was distressed because of it. Yet, I saw other things.

"I'll help you, but, you must agree to do what I tell you?"

"I'll do whatever you say," she replied.

I said to her, "You'll leave here right now, and you'll go home. You'll go through the front door and you'll go to the room where your sick husband is. You'll stay with him a short while, and you'll watch what he does. Afterwards, you'll get up and you'll say to him, "I want to go out for an hour or so, for shopping." But you won't go to the market. You'll go around your house, and you'll go back in, through the back door. Be careful that he doesn't catch on to you. You'll stay there in the kitchen for an hour and you'll put your ear to the wall, and listen to what he does. When the hour is up, leave by the back door, and enter from the front door, into his bedroom. Again, you'll watch what he does as soon as you enter.

The lady did what I told her. She came back the next day. "What happened?" I asked.

"As soon as I went in through the front door," she said, "into my husband's room, he started to cough loudly, to spit on the ground, and to complain bitterly, that I don't love him, that I don't feel sorry for him at all and I let him suffer on his own. A short while later I told him that I would go to shopping for an hour or so. More coughs and complaints. When I went into the kitchen, I noticed that there was complete silence in my husband's room. The hour passed and I went back to him again. As soon as I opened the door and he started to cough and complain again, saying that he had suffered all the time I had been away. He said that he coughed, shouted for help, and nearly died all alone."

"Do you now realize what's happening?" I asked her. "I'm confused. I don't know what to think," she replied. "I'll explain," I said. "Your husband has a demon inside him. I saw it the moment you came yesterday. The demon brought him the asthma and your husband wants to finish you off with his asthma.

Because you are very sensitive and compassionate, you melt more and more

because you are very sensitive and compassionate, you men more and more from your distress, as you see him suffering and continually complaining to you, that you don't care about him. He is not distressed at all. He coughs and spits and complains only when he has you next to him, because you are in his sights. As soon as you leave, and he cannot see you, he calms down."

The lady looked at me and gradually realised what was going on. I told her what to do in order to be fight off the devil, so both her and her husband could be free of it. She listened to me, and now they are doing better."

It made an impression on me, on the one hand, the manslaughtering craftiness of the devil, and on the other, the sharp perceptiveness of the Elder and his healing intervention. I had a question, "Elder, was that asthma psychological? I mean, was it imagined?"

"No," he replied. "It was real asthma, but it came from the demon, who used it like a murder weapon against that lady."

From those words, I realised that demons sometimes have the ability to tempt us, not only in the soul, but in the body too. Indeed, with murderous intentions. I also realized that the help of the saints for our salvation is as necessary as this is certain. This, of course, should not scare us, because the power of Christ is incomparably greater than the power of the devil. As the Elder says, "Somebody who is Christ's, must love Christ, and when he loves Christ he is delivered from the devil, from hell and from death."<sup>[5]</sup>

In general, the subject of the devil's capacity to intervene in people's lives needs some careful attention. At one end of the spectrum we find those who do not believe that he exists and more easily fall victim to him, because they attribute his activities to other factors, like their own will, or the will of others, who they turn against. While, at the other end, we find those who are too scared of the devil and live worrying continually about his evil activities and their influence in their lives. The truth is somewhere in between, as the book of Job and the Fathers teach us. That is to say, demons can only threaten us. They cannot carry out their threats without God's concession. In addition, they can deceive us and lead us astray. However, they cannot deceive us against our will. So, we are undaunted in confronting them when they attack us, since we love Christ and call upon His help and the prayers of His saints, with humility and faith. Thus, having truly confessed and taking communion, using the power of His Cross, to expel them and break up their evil plots. However, for those of us who are beginners in spiritual life the best thing is to turn to Christ and to hold the devil in contempt and to be indifferent to his works. This, under the guidance, always, of our spiritual father.

The devil can only bother someone's body with God's concession (see Job 1:11-12 2:6-7) either for his sins or to prove his virtue through trials like Job

1:11-12, 2:18-19) Elder for his sins, or to prove his virtue through trials, like Job. However, God is always with the person tempted, in order to help him bear the temptation and to overcome it, like St. Paul the Apostle, who was given “a thorn in the flesh” so that he would not be proud. He was also given plenty of God’s Grace that was sufficient to show the strength of God through Man’s weakness.

### *A Cancer Patient who was Cured by Surgery*

I had told someone about Fr. Porphyrios, and he wanted to meet him. However, before he managed to do this, he became sick. The tests confirmed that he had cancer. Many doctors were asked and each one formulated his own opinion about the best way to confront the sickness. The patient chose to entrust his health to the doctor that he had most faith in. It was necessary for me to also ask the spiritual doctor, Fr. Porphyrios, about what should be done. He was thoughtful the first time I saw him, but didn’t give me an answer. The second time he had some specific guidance in his heart and said, “What the doctor says, and what the patient himself decides will happen.” I conveyed the Elder’s opinion to the patient. The doctor was asked, and he suggested an operation. All the other doctors had considered surgery to be a fruitless attempt. The patient decided to agree to the operation, in order to confront the problem radically. The doctor’s suggestion and the patient’s decision coincided amazingly. Then I said to them, “It is clear, that surgery is the will of God, as Fr. Porphyrios articulated. There is no greater assurance than carrying out God’s will in every situation. The long and dangerous operation took place. At the same time, on the Elder’s advice, there was a rally to prayer that included many people, priests, monks, lay people, in assorted places, especially during the time the operation was going on. Naturally, the prayers of Fr. Porphyrios took first place in this “armada of prayer”. Following the laborious efforts of the surgeon, the operation was a great success. Two decades have passed since then, and the patient is alive, healthy and giving thanks to God.”

### *An Operation on the Brain Succeeds*

A lump appeared on my friend’s brain. His morale was shattered and he had lost all hope. The doctors reckoned that he only had up to six months to live. I told him about Elder Porphyrios. He listened with great interest and started to regain his courage. He was in hospital and unable to go to see the Elder himself, so he asked me to go to the Elder, and to ask him if he should be treated in Greece or in England. The Elder answered, “I see that the lump is on the right hand side of his head. It is preferable that he goes to England. From here, I’ll

pray that God enlighten the doctors to do their job well. They should be a bit careful of the cold, over there.” I conveyed the Elder’s words to my friend and his family. They left for London, where the doctor’s recommended an operation. After it had been performed, the chief surgeon called the patient’s brother to his office. He hurried there, scared, suspecting that he would hear the worst. The chief surgeon put him at ease and explained that he had called him to congratulate him. It was something he did, as an exception, each time that an operation was an unexpected success. Upon leaving the hospital, the patient caught a cold, because he was lightly dressed. This caused them to extend their stay at the London hotel for a week longer, until the patient recovered from his cold. When they returned to Athens and thanked the Elder warmly for his great help, they also apologised because they had not followed his words exactly. As they told me, when they were in London, having the serious problem of the operation before them, they thought the Elder’s warning about the cold was just a joke. Nonetheless, it nearly caused serious complications for them.

### *Twenty-Seven Cases of Advice, Diagnosis, Cure*

1. Someone asked the Elder what the high cholesterol that the microbiologist had found in his blood came from. He answered, “It comes from distress and your diet.”

2. Another person asked him about problems with his nervous system and he replied, “the cause is psychological”

3. A third person said to him, “Elder, in the last few years, as I pray more, and take part in the mysteries of the Church my anxiety has lessened.” And the Elder replied, “It’s just like that, God’s Grace has had mercy on you.<sup>1</sup>

4. Someone had a rare fracture in his wrist bones and the doctor suggested surgery. He asked the Fr. Porphyrios. The Elder saw all the bones that passed through and crossed over the point of the fracture and noted that if the operation failed the man would be disabled. Faced with that risk he chose to avoid the operation. The result was that over time he was able to use his hand again, without any serious difficulties.

5. He advised another person to avoid an operation on the prostate, in order to avoid the risk of it become carcinogenous.

6. One afternoon, the Elder was talking with a group of visitors out in the open. The subject of discussion was environmental pollution. The Elder turned to the women and said, “You women, in order to avoid sicknesses, you wash your fruit and vegetables, don’t you? Some of you even use soap?”

“Yes,” they answered. Then the Elder added, “But you don’t know that the rot

is inside.”

7. One of his spiritual daughters saw that he was very thin, and advised him, saying, “You should eat well, Elder.” He replied, “I eat and it eats at me.”

8. A young man who was a carrier of AIDS visited the Elder. He was in despair and asked the Elder if he could find refuge in a monastery, and become a monk. The Elder comforted him, and advised him to cultivate his faith in Christ, who is the only hope and refuge, in every situation. Regarding the monastery he said, that one should not enter it from need and despair, but from hope in Christ and love for Him.

9. A cancer patient who was in the final stages of his sickness, through a friend, asked the Elder to tell him whether he would live or not. The Elder did not reply to the question. He simply said that he prayed to God, and sent him a prayer-rope. A few days later, the patient left for heaven, while praying, holding the prayer-rope in his hand.

10. A University lecturer visited the Elder in the mobile home where he lived, one summer day. When he met with him, he asked that he also give his blessing to his father-in-law who was in his car. The Elder moved towards the car, and extended his hand in greeting, but the father-in-law did not move, because the windows were shut. When the lecturer intervened, his father-in-law was able to open the window from inside the car. The Elder said, “Get out, man. Are you from the greenhouse?” The father-in-law explained that he was sick and had to be careful. Then the Elder told him how necessary the sun, fresh air and movement was. He also gave him special guidance about protecting his health. Among other things, I remember that he advised him to live in a place that was not at a great height, nor at a low level, not too close to the sea, but not too far away. In general, he advised him to take the middle road.

11. A childless lady who had gone through many miscarriages was pregnant again. She rushed to the Elder in her anxiety, seeking his support. He “saw” that her problems were psychological. He advised her to rent a room in a neighbouring village, and to calm down. She should not communicate with her relatives, who conveyed their worries to her, not even by telephone. The lady followed his advice. Indeed, she visited him from time to time and became much calmer. In the end, she gave birth to a healthy baby boy. She called him Porphyrios in gratitude. A friend of mine had told me about the matter. Then, one day, when I was in the Elder’s cell a small child went into the Elder’s cell, quite at ease. The Elder greeted him, with great joy, and gave him some sweets. A tractor could be heard outside. “Do you know who that is, with the tractor?” he asked. “It is the father of little Porphyrios, who came into the cell just now. From his happiness he comes here with his tractor now and then and digs the

garden over.” Plenty of children were born, following his advice, and many were called Porphyrios. His above words were wrapped up in a broad smile.

12. As a healer of souls, a psychiatrist in the true sense of the word, the Elder had his doubts about what is commonly called psychiatry. One day he asked, “Elder, is what I heard true? Do you attend psychiatry classes?” The Elder appeared shocked and said, “Where did you learn that, kid? You know once I was thinking, and I wondered: How is it possible to have psychiatrists who do not believe in the soul?<sup>[6]</sup> So, I got up and went to the University a few times and attended some classes on psychiatry. Well, they do try to do something, but what can they do? Psychiatrists and psychologists are like a blind man, who tries to understand the things around him by touch. The soul is very deep and only God really knows it.” Another time he said to me, “I don’t want psychiatry, but I do love psychiatrists.”

13. An acquaintance of mine, who lived in Northern Italy, called me and asked me to get the opinion of Fr. Porphyrios regarding a specific problem his wife had. He was separated from her at the time, given that the same problems had been exhibited to a noted psychiatrist who had concluded that she was suffering from psychiatric problems. The Elder listened to me carefully and replied, “Tell your acquaintance to ask his famous doctor, if he has been to see a doctor himself?”

14. A doctor friend asked me to submit his written question to the Elder concerning a personal problem of his. I am copying the conversation from a note I made in order to inform the doctor: “Question related to his problem. Elder’s answer: “Now then, what’s that suppression he’s talking about, and asking if it is related to his psychological problem? What’s that about it being hereditary?”

«You mean, Elder, that neither the first nor the second thing is the matter?»

«Nothing’s the matter. Everything that he writes belongs to the old man that we have within us. But when we love Christ with all our soul, when divine eros comes, then all our problems leave and we are filled with spiritual joy. You know that, kid, I’ve told you about it so many times before. Look, it’s like this (and he made a typical gesture with his hand that crawls in the beginning and gradually raises itself up). Psychiatrists and psychologists talk about suppression and inherited traits, because they do not know the human soul that can only be cured by divine eros and lives in the joy in Christ.

15. The Elder advised the relative of a person suffering from a neurosis to take care of himself, in case he was infected too. When he was asked how that could happen because his illness was not contagious, the Elder replied: «It’s not like how you say. The incorporeal germs of nervous disease fly, they fly, like gnats and affect the soul. (He made an impersonation of those germs, by moving his fingers expressively). It is good that you help the person suffering from neurosis



ingers expressively). It is good that you help the person suffering from neurosis, but you must protect your own soul, with the grace of Christ.»

16. The Elder told the mother of a neurotic child that the child had a beautiful soul, but it had become sick from her bad company. He revealed to her that the child would suddenly become well. He knew when this was, but it was not right to tell her. However, he made clear, that he would become well, when the mother became holy, starting with quitting smoking.

17. The Elder told a heartbroken father who had taken his sick child to see the Elder, «Your child is fine, but because you had put too much pressure on him to do well at school, he couldn't stand it, he cracked, and suffered a nervous breakdown.»

«Well, how come I was able to stand so much war, and so much deprivation when I was a child?» The father asked. «You lived in another age,» the Elder answered.

18. The Elder advised a young widow, who was very sorrowful, to work hard, in order to avoid the depression that threatened her. With the occupational therapy and prayer, which the Elder recommended, the results were amazing. Her sorrow was transformed into internal peace and joy. So much so, that she wondered if she had gone mad. The Elder put her at ease, and assured her that her spiritual joy came from the Grace she had received from Christ.

19. He advised the parents of a young girl who had attempted suicide to encircle her with the protection of the strong prayers of as many people as possible. That is what happened and the girl was saved from a relapse.

20. The parents of a bad-mannered and rebellious child found recourse in the Elder. They lamented about their situation and sought advice from him on the best way to confront it. The Elder told them what they themselves should be careful of in their life. Every now and then, the parents mentioned the matter of their child to him, but the Elder again told them about their Christian duties as parents. Then the parents became annoyed and said, “Elder, we didn't come here about ourselves. We knew about what you are telling us even when we were small children, and we teach it to others. We came about our child.” Then the Elder said, “But can't you see that I've been talking about your child all this time? Don't you understand that your child's salvation comes through your own sanctification? Not the theory, but the practice of sanctification.” A moment later he added, “You should start that work at once, if you really love your child. I have just seen his soul; it is “dead meat”.

21. The parents of a boy who had a nervous disorder visited the Elder, asking for his help with their problem. The Elder “saw” the child's soul and said, “Your child as a very good soul, better than mine. He is not sick, he was wounded and rebelled against your own pride and that of your bad friends, who you keep

rebelled against your own pride and that of your bad friends, who you keep company with. He'll get well, with your sanctification" As soon as the mother heard this she started to cry in despair, because she believed that it was impossible for her to become holy. Then the Elder said, "Holiness is not something impossible. In fact, it is easy, you just have to acquire humility and love."

22. A handicapped girl asked for the Elder's blessing and advice about the problem's she faced, living in a wheelchair. The Elder blessed her, and amongst other things said, "Above all, keep yourself away from anxiety. Anxiety is a sickness of the soul and it isn't based on material want. A healthy person can have millions in the bank and still be attacked by anxiety. Anxiety is fought off by trust in God's Providence and by fighting the good fight."

23. One day the Elder said to me, in brief, "Sicknesses do us good, when we go through them without grumbling, asking God to forgive us from our sins, and glorifying his name."

24. Another time he said to me, just as briefly, "We get sick when we become attached to people and things." This view was another expression of physical illness that comes from the soul's attachment to the body. This, because, what, barring sin, is the attachment of our soul to created things and people, rather than the Creator Himself?

25. The Elder also said, "Parents who have difficult and bad-mannered children, should not turn against their children, but against the person behind the children, the devil. We cannot fight the devil, unless we become saints ourselves." This succinct advice could effectively help parents, educators, doctors and whoever works with children.

26. A monk, who had just returned from post-graduate studies in America, visited the Elder. When he sat opposite him, the Elder immediately said, "I see that you got mixed up at that place where you went." Later the monk said that the Elder's words were an accurate x-ray of his soul, that he was confused and troubled by the influence of various ideological movements, which he came across when abroad. The Elder helped him find the correct way-out from his tangle of problems.

27. Once, a worldly lady, with many degrees and a host of social activities, but a sensitive soul, too, was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. She resorted to the Elder. He "saw" the state of her soul immediately and described her state in one short phrase: "You've run down." The lady was impressed with this unusual diagnosis. However, it precisely described the whole disorder that she was going through in her soul, because of her many insurmountable problems. The Elder commiserated with her and enveloped her in his loving care like his spiritual daughter. She also became a devoted disciple of his because with his

spiritual daughter. She also became a devoted disciple of his, because with his brilliant guidance, her soul was rehabilitated and she was reborn in Christ.

### *Illnesses of Body and Soul*

The Elder always gave prominence to sickness of soul, regardless of whether the physical illness was serious or not. Many sick visitors insisted that he only pray for the cure of their physical sicknesses. They could not bear them. They thought that if their bodily illness spread it would shake their faith in Christ and would finally lead them to be sick in soul. According to the Elder, exactly the opposite took place, “The sickness of the soul, that they were oblivious to, i.e. sin, blinded their eyes and they could not see the higher educational meaning of their physical sickness. A sickness that was allowed by God’s love. The Elder knew that if he only prayed for the cure of their body he wouldn’t help them, because in essence they would be incurable. He always tried to link the healing of their bodies with the healing of their souls.

At a religious gathering a Christian psychiatrist<sup>[2]</sup> was heard to say, “As a psychiatrist I am not a healer of the human soul, but of the nervous system.” He was actually speaking literally, because someone who has psychiatric illness, in the literal sense of the term, is the unrepentant sinner. The soul is only ever sick when it sins without repenting. The only true doctor of the soul is Christ. Also, through the Grace of Christ the saint, knowing the soul, has acquired self-knowledge and knowledge of others. How can a person who is not a saint, a person with passions, who is ignorant of the soul, both his own and that of others, be a doctor of souls? Christ, and, by Christ’s Grace, the saint, can do the easier thing, that is heal the body, insofar as they can do the more difficult thing, that is heal the soul. This occurs when the former helps the later.

Physical sicknesses serve a wide variety of purposes for God’s overabounding love. The simple view that physically sick are punished by God for their sins and those who are physically healthy are rewarded by God for their virtues is reminiscent of superstition. In reality, the exact opposite can happen, as in the case of many saints who are sick in body for life, and many unrepentant sinners who are healthy in body all their life. Of course, nobody can deny that a soul disturbed by sinful passions is ripe ground for physical illnesses to develop and grow. Whereas, a peaceful soul, full of devotion to God, creates suitable conditions for the cure of those illnesses and for physical health to flourish. However, the particular fluctuations between physical health and sickness in each person, in the final analysis are a secret expression of the fatherly care of God that only He and his saints know.

## *Cheers Up While Healing, is Cheerful When Sick*

With his healing gift the Elder diagnosed and cured the sicknesses of many people. However, he himself was sick throughout his life and confessed, “I don’t even know how many sicknesses I’ve got.” He had shingles, which was the crown of all his sicknesses, and like a “thorn in his flesh”. In the last few years of his life, it slapped him in the face, and he said, “I feel like they’ve stuck a frying pan with burning hot oil to my cheek.” The Elder taught that, “Sicknesses are due to demonic activities, to sin. But when Christ dwells throughout the soul, then the devil leaves, sin leaves and the sickness leaves.” At the same time, regarding himself, he said, “I feel that I am most sinful person in the world.” A superficial look at his illness would probably lead to questions like the following: The Elder cured the sicknesses of so many people, why couldn’t he cure his own? He recognised his own great sinfulness, perhaps that was the reason why Christ did not dwell within him and did not cure his illness?

However, the fact that the Elder confessed that he was “the most sinful person in the world” shows his great humility, in Christ. The unrepentant sinners arrogantly believe that they are sinless. Just like the Pharisees did. All the saints, starting with St. Paul the Apostle, declared, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief” (1 Tim 1:15) And the Elder was a saint, as was obvious from his life in imitation of Christ. Yet, someone could still ask: “If he was a saint, then why didn’t Christ cure him of his illness?” In fact, the exact opposite occurred: Christ did cure the Elder of his illness. He cured him from what really is illness, sin, the illness of the soul, while he lived through physical sickness.

The first created, Adam and Eve, did not know sickness of the body before their fall into sin by the devil’s entrapment, that is, before their illness of soul. After their fall, the whole of nature became ill, and all suffering came about, including bodily sickness. Christ became Man in order to “destroy the works of the devil” (1 Jn. 3:8), to cure us from Adam’s illness, from sin. He told us that, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Mk. 2:17)

Realizing that we are sick, through our baptism and continuous repentance we receive, from the one and only physician, the cure of our soul from sickness, that is from sin. Bodily sickness remains, through God’s concession, as a penance for sins forgiven, as a healing discipline, as a stage of further purifying athletic exercise of the soul fighting against sin, to the shame of the devil, and to the glory of God. This is what happened with poor Lazarus, who gained Paradise through his uncomplaining perseverance. It also happened to a wealth of saints,

who, by their patience, repentance, their glorification of God, in their illness, were purified like gold in a furnace.

St. John Chrysostom testifies that bodily health becomes a soul saving blessing only when it leads to the increase of gratitude and obedience towards God. But how many people are grateful? One in ten? Like the ten lepers of the Gospel? A lot less? The health of the body often becomes a trap for the soul, a illusory narcotic, like the rich man in the parable, who “fared sumptuously every day,” ended up in the “place of torment”.

The Elder revealed mysteries of God to us, not only in his teaching, but in the way he lived. It is a fact that through his physical illness the power of the Lord was perfected, His miraculous works came to light, and His name was glorified. It is also true that the devil was shamed by the affliction of these illnesses, and it proved that the Elder was faithful to God until the very end. This was not from self-serving personal advantage, but wholly from love. Just like Job, who was “blameless and upright, who feared God and shunned evil” (Job 1:1). With his noted patience and obedience to God he stopped Satan’s boasts and confirmed the superiority of God’s love, that “never fails”. God allowed the devil to provoke the Elder and place him in temptation, with his bodily sickness The Elder accepted this temptation with loving self- denial. This self-denial of his helps us understand, even if only slightly, the his articulation of his own experience which we find so amazing. “I was in deep pain. It was wonderful.”

The Elder did not want to suffer passively and be defeated by pain. He did not want to wallow in the unhealthy self-pity of failure. On the contrary, he endured each hellish provocation of pain heroically, in order to conquer it with the power of Christ. He rose above it, like the holy martyrs, and his soul became healthier and healthier. By triumphing over hellish pain of bodily illness, the Elder could also declare with St. Paul the Apostle, “I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up my flesh with what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the Church” (Col 1:24). The Elder’s joy in his “sufferings” conveyed his delight at having, in Christ, overcome his physical illness. This holds like a tragic irony, because the Elder melted like a candle, right up until the last moments of his life. This with the continual and relentless wounds of all his sicknesses together. The Elder secretly lived through St. Paul’s experience of the Cross-and-Resurrection: “Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day” (2 Cor. 4:16) Day by day, the Elder won his battle for liberation from physical illness, for himself, his neighbour, and for the Church of Christ. Freedom that is acquired with continual renewal of the soul, in Christ, independently of the flesh’s deterioration. This feat of the Elder’s seems to be beyond my

understanding, because I do not have similar experience of the Holy Spirit. This is why I have kept to a surface description of it, in an attempt to approach it in an intelligible manner, recognising the limitations of the undertaking beforehand.

### *The Soul's Liberation Loosens the Bonds of Sickness*

The testimony of a tetraplegic paralysed man made a great impression on me. He walked again and continues to walk, due to a miracle by St. Nectarios. He assured us that one day, when he was praying intensely, the grace of Christ entered his soul and filled it with unspeakable joy. Although he continued to be paralyzed, he felt that he had become well, that he was completely healthy. It was not an illusion. He knew that he was physically disabled, and continued to be so. However, he was now indifferent to it, he was not at all sad about it. His joy at gaining the health of his soul was more than enough. Later, God granted him his physical health, too.<sup>[8]</sup>

<sup>[1]</sup> Publisher's note: The Elder's doctor advised him to have a cataract operation. However, out of sensitivity, when the Elder agreed, he did not perform the operation himself, but entrusted a famous colleague with it. When the latter spilt the glazing fluid, he gave him a cortisone injection next to his eye in ignorance. This injection gave rise to a diffuse stomach lesion, which ended up with continuous internal bleeding, or hemorrhaging, of the stomach, which lasted for three months.

<sup>[2]</sup> The Elder actually uses this medical term, which is Greek in origin. In English it is not a familiar term, but is a kind of bony tumour. [Translator].

<sup>[3]</sup> The day after Pentecost. [Translator].

<sup>[4]</sup> Here Elder Porphyrios is referring to the Greek word for 'medicine' - *φάρμακο* (*pharmako*) that he compares to the derived Greek word for 'poison' - *φαρμάκι* (*pharmaki*). Both have the same ancient Greek root that originally meant a healing herb and later came to mean a remedy, or potion in general. The English words 'pharmacy' and 'pharmacist' also come from the same Greek word. [Translator].

<sup>[5]</sup> Publisher's note: Originally recorded on cassette available from the publisher's with a booklet containing the original Greek text. A full English translation entitled, "Christ is Everything" can be found in the book *Elder Porphyrios: Testimonies and Experiences* by Klitos Ioannides, published by the Convent of the Transfiguration, Athens 1997, p. 62.

<sup>[6]</sup> The word "psychiatrist" is from Greek, and it means literally, a doctor of the soul. [Translator].

<sup>[7]</sup> see previous footnote. [Translator].

<sup>[8]</sup> Publisher's Note: The author is referring to Stavros Kalkandes, a squadron leader. His story of how he met Elder Porphyrios can be found in the book *Elder Porphyrios: Testimonies and Experiences* by Klitos Ioannides, published by the Convent of the Transfiguration, Athens 1997. Further down we add his own brief description of his miracle cure, that was recorded by a friend on the 9th January 1993.

## Publisher's Supplement IV

*A paralytic who became well, because he went to St. Nectarios and said, "I didn't come to ask anything from you; I came to give you my life," narrates:*

### *Introduction*

In 1941, in the Middle East, Stavros Kalkandes became a paraplegic following a military accident. He was able to walk a little, with difficulty. However, surgery paralyzed him completely. He went to America for treatment. The doctors could not do anything. One of them told him to get in touch with the great doctor, God. When he returned to Greece, the most blessed holy hieromonk and elder, Philotheos Zervakos visited him in the hospital of his own accord. Stavros Kalkandes himself tells us what happened afterwards in the account below.

### *Account*

When Fr. Philotheos told me that he spoke with God, he said that as he was walking along the road he heard, he said, the voice of the Lord, which directed him to the hospital. It told him to go and see a young man who had just come from abroad, that is, me.

In the meanwhile, I learned that Patitsas (the chief mechanic) had become a monk. Arsenios, Fr. Philotheos called him. He was at the Holy Protection, here, on the new calendar, where Fr. Chrysanthos was, and so he found me. But I didn't believe all that. I believed that my mother sent him. One day Arsenios came, dressed as a monk, and says to me,

"Hello, Stavros!"

I say, "Hello, who are you?"

He says, "I'm Costas Patitsas"

I say, "How am I meant to recognize you in those robes..." and I say to him, "My love, the abbot, didn't come unfortunately."

Then, he says: "But the Abbot's love sent me"

"Who's the Abbot?" I say.

"Don't you know?" he says to me, "He's from St. Nectarios and he's got all the "symptoms" of St. Nectarios. He talks with God in the street."

the symptoms of St. Nectarios. He talks with God in the street.

So, the first time that Fr. Philotheos came we talked about everything the American doctor had told me.

When I asked the Elder if it was difficult for someone to communicate with God, he said to me, "What's that, my child? However difficult it seems, it is, in fact, very easy. It is enough that you want it, you believe, you pray and the first step is confession and Holy Communion. Is that difficult?"

I said to him, "If I do all that, will I communicate with God?"

"Yes," he told me. So, I started going to confession.

Well, Fr. Athanasios was father confessor here at the Church of the Mother of God of the Bitter Oranges [Neranjotissa], in Marousi [Athens], by the railway tracks. It is a little, thousand-year-old church. I went there and confessed. He sent me there and I was given a penance of no communion for one year, because I had been involved with a girl. I was saddened and I told him that I was a tetraplegic, I couldn't move my hands, or feet, or anything else.

"I'm at Death's door, Elder, and you give me that punishment?"

"No," he said, "I am responsible for you."

Then I said to Patitsas, "Arsenios, please bring Fr. Philotheos... "I wanted to appeal the decision in some way. The Elder came to the hospital, before ten days had passed and I told him that I wanted to confess. He told me the same thing, and gave me the same penance.

I thought to myself, "Do you think they've made an agreement?" because I always dissented. From then on, I always yielded and I said to him, "Why don't we go to St. Nectarios, your spiritual father, and ask him to help me?"

"Let's go there," he said to me.

So, we went. We said a Paraklisis<sup>u</sup> in the afternoon. We said a Paraklisis and the miracle happened. That is, what miracle... A person asks for his body to move, his limbs and everything else that is paralyzed to move, but the miracle has got to take place from within. For the old man to change, and the new one to come. To be renewed. Well, on that day he put a bit of cotton to my mouth. I couldn't venerate [the relics]. My body could not bend. When we went back the next day, immediately, I no longer felt that my arms and legs were missing. Then I started to become very active, and we formed a union for the disabled. From 1963, the President was the Airforce Commander in Chief, Theodosiades. We asked for blankets, because there were none. He sent an airforce work gang and we painted the barracks inside. We also built a chapel in the establishment, dedicated to the Holy Archangels. Musical delegations came, and we had the opening ceremony. From being one person, when we started we became 300 and we fixed up the chapel in a month.

When then time was up I had my foot in plaster after a tendon operation. Fr



When their time was up, I had my foot in plaster after a tendon operation, Fr. Philotheos called me on the phone and said, “My child, (it was the Sunday of the Holy Fathers, he was devoted to the Holy Fathers, he cried, he shed tears and shouted out the untold scented flowers of Paradise), would you like to go to St. Nectarios and St. Menas with me?”

I said, “Elder, my leg’s in plaster.”

“I know,” he said, ‘but do you want to go?’

“I do,” I said.

So we went, with two soldiers, Fr. Philotheos, and the secretary. We went and we slept there, the time that they had imposed on me was nearly up. When the Divine Liturgy finished I said, “Elder, shall we say a Paraklisis to the Saint...” But I forgot to tell you, on that day, the first time we went, a lady heard all the people going in and out and said to me,

“Who are the priests doing the Paraklisis?”

I said, “The Elder”

“And the other one?” she asked me.

“Which other one?” I said.

So we went to the Elder and we said to him, “The Elder saw two priests, you and someone else. Was someone else really there?”

He said, “Yes, my child, it was St. Nectarios.”

“But what are you saying, Elder, I wasn’t able to see him!”

He said to me, “And one day I’ll tell you what he told me about you.”

I started to shudder and I said, “What are those things? How do those things happen?”

So, as I was saying, the time was up, we went, and the Liturgy ended. His Eminence the Metropolitan of Hydra, out of respect, always let the Elder give the sermon, when he was there, and not himself, the bishop. We did the Paraklisis and I said that I had a grievance because until then I had not venerated the saint’s relics. “Please ask the abbess to let them place them on my knees. Actually, she said it was fine. So my brother went and picked them up and put them on me. (Of course all these things happened with some emotion) and they placed my hands over the reliquary. I closed my eyes and thought that I was embracing him completely. I said,

“Saint Nectarios, this time I didn’t come to ask for anything. I came to give. I came to give you my life. I came to give you my very being. Make me worthy, in whatever position I find myself, whether in a wheelchair or standing, to become a reason for your all holy name to be glorified. That’s what I ask. Show me that you hear me in my prayer.”

That was my topic. I expected an invisible hand to lift me up from my back. Meanwhile, on the ferryboat [on the way back] I said to the others. “Leave the

windows open so that we help the invisible hand lift me up.”

I returned to the hospital and four or five days later, it was the feast of the Holy Unmercenaries, Ss Cosmas and Damian, I realized that my body had been freed. It was fastened before. So, I got up, the guys came and helped me up, and I stood on my own feet. I put orthopedic equipment on my legs, and I said that I didn’t know what I had to do to walk. Had I never walked before? Had I never run before? And yet, I had forgotten what I had to do in order to walk. They told me to lift my foot up. I lifted it up, one step, and I say to them, “Chaps, I’m well.”

I called the doctors, the physiotherapists, the nurses, and I said to them, “Do you believe that I’ll be able to get up one day?”

The doctor said, “It is out of the question. Don’t forget you’ve got muscular atrophy, muscular degeneracy, you’ve got tetraplegy with orthocystic aberrations for so many years, it is impossible for such a thing to happen.”

“You, and the others?”

Nobody spoke.

I said to them, “I can get up and walk, but I won’t be able to do it for you today. Since, I would like to offer my first few steps to the chapel I built. The first steps are Christ’s.” Then I gathered all the disabled together and told them that the time had come for me to walk. I said that God doesn’t make distinctions between people, like people do, and that their turn would come. A father may have ambitions for his son. The Heavenly Father is like that for everybody, as long as you want it, you pray, and you communicate with him. So, they took me to the chapel. The priest came, too.

Well, they lifted me up from the chair. I couldn’t move my hands. We went into the chapel. The priest came chanting, “Who is so great a God as our God!”

So, from then on, I stood up and started my work. I was able to speak anywhere at all, and explain those events of those 24 years.

I also want to tell you something else here. A few days ago, when I was in the Airforce Hospital, there was a Brigadier-General called so-and-so, who is an oncologist, cancer doctor, and I don’t know what else. He is destined to become the general director of the Athens General Hospital. Well, he came, even though I was paralysed again and abandoned he said to me, “Mr. Kalkandes, you must go home, we cannot do more for you than what we have already done.”

I said to him, “I am at military disposal. I am considered to be in action. I will try and stand up on my own two feet.”

“That is what we all wish for,” he said to me, “but is not feasible for you. That is, you won’t be able to walk, or even stand up.”

“Don’t you know,” I said, “what is impossible for man is possible for God.

Aren't you aware of what happened to me some years ago in my life? That I was a tetraplegic for twenty-four years, that I was in bed, and I got up? If you don't know that you came to visit me in vain."

But that shook me and in the evening I called upon the Virgin of the Door [Portaitissa] that I had opposite me, with prayer that was more fervent. John had stuck it there. I prayed to her fervently. The next day was the final Paraklisis, the Mother of God visited me, but because our eyes are sinful and earthly, it was not easy for us to see her. The room was filled with the fragrance of jasmine. A fragrance so strong, that my brother and I could not breath in there. A first wave stopped, a second wave came, a third wave... It showed that the Virgin was in there.

Then I say, "Help me, Mother of God, and give me health of soul and body." The next day I stood up on my feet and went down for exercises.

The physiotherapists could not believe their eyes. They could not believe that I was able to get up. Meanwhile, 10-15 days later the regular director came, who had been on leave, Mr. so-and-so and he said, "Don't tell me anything, I know about it, but, lift up your legs for me..." I lifted them up. Then he said, "Stavros, I give up You don't come under the laws of human science. You have another science of your own. Go ahead," he said, "on your own. I cannot help you. I'm sorry, but I cannot." Well, I got up and said to him, "I'll go now, not because Mr. So-and-so wants it." However, I saw Mr. So- and-so with a group of doctors. I said,

"Brigadier General, Sir, you'll have learnt that I have got up.

"Yes," he said, "I have."

"I hope that you were not too upset by the poor prognosis you made about me"

"Me? What did I do?"

"You've forgotten that you said that I would not be able to walk."

"Me? I told you such a thing?"

"I'm sorry then that you don't have the strength of your convictions to say, "Yes, I said it because that is what I believed." I'm not asking you to say why I got up and how I got up..."

Well then, I want to say there is never something bad, without some good mixed in. The same thing happened when I got up in America. There was the nurse, who always came, and turned me over, and he would put a dollar or two in my pillow case. What happened in America is a long story. I found out that God works with all people, regardless of race and religion. They are all his children. Nobody can say that we have the birthright and the Jews and the others are illegitimate. For God is one and the same.

Then that important doctor called me. He the father of the third phase of medicine. He had called Dr. Cooper an important neurological surgeon, a university professor, and he saw me and said that I would never be able to get up again. I was very upset, and he tapped me on the back, affectionately. The nurse took me up to his office and he said to me: (now I'd left one and gone to the other), "Stavros, I want to help you, but I can't as a doctor, as a professor. However, there is another doctor, who is much greater than us, and I would like you to get in touch with him."

I said to him, without having understood, "Where does he live? What's he called? I'll go and see him."

"Well," he said, "He is God."

When I heard the word "God", I was saddened, because I took it selfishly.

"I don't come from an uncivilised nation. I'm not ignorant. If I was going to hope in God I could have stayed in Greece. I came so that people, science, could help me and now you refer me where? To God! Who's ever been to God? So that I can ask them how to get there? How I can get in touch with God? What is God anyhow?"

Well, he says to me, "Do you love me Stavros?"

"I really do love you and I consider you to be my second father, because I was orphaned when I was six years old, when my father, who was a doctor, died."

He said to me, "Keep praying to God and if you don't believe, do it for me, if you love me." I thanked him and left. When I went to lie down the nurse took off the equipment. He put the urinal in between my legs, because I could not move my hand and arms at all, and he covered me up. Then I started to think about why the doctor had talked to me about God. He wasn't Orthodox, he wasn't a theologian. He wasn't a priest. Why did he try to convince me that I would only get well with God? In the end I couldn't find an answer on the matter and was sad, because I would never be able to get up and walk again.

I was young. I wanted to live. I had my ambitions and dreams. I was 23 years old when they operated on me. The problem was that I tried to find a way out of this anxiety. I urinated and my legs twitched. Because I was naked I was wet up to my neck and I started to become cold and to shiver. I said to the patient next to me, "Ring the bell for me, because I've wet myself."

Really, that nurse really did show good conduct. He would come and turn me over and changed me ... This time however God showed me hard-heartedness. He came and said to me, "What do you want?" I said, I've wet myself, and I would like you to wash me and change me."

If he washed me, changed me and turned me over, I would have slept, because I was tired. But God did not allow such a thing to happen. The nurse was hard

hearted and did not come back to change me. So, I now had nowhere to lay my head, and I had started to pray to Christ, since the time that I was in the Middle East. I said to Him, having brought Him to mind: “My Christ, do you remember when I went up to Jerusalem the first time and going up I saw that Christ knelt here, and the Cyrene lifted up his cross? Do you remember how I stood in one corner because I was too embarrassed to kneel, because I was in uniform, but I knelt on the knees of my soul and I said, Lord, that I would like to be the Cyrene, and lift up your cross? Who will lift up my own cross? Can’t you see me?”

Then there is a bright flash of light and I fall down. I try to get up, and I can’t. Then I hear a single voice, “You’ll get up, don’t hurry”

Well, the thing is this, the nurse’s hard-heartedness made me communicate with the divine. The hard-heartedness of the doctor, the brigadier, made me communicate with the Mother of God. So, I owe them both thanks; gratitude to both of them. See how God works, and then we often call God hardhearted and unjust.

Can God who is justice, who is full of love towards people, towards his creation, ever be able to be unjust to a human being? But human beings, myself the most, are unaware, ungrateful, and always forget God.

End of Supplement

### *The Victory of the Soul’s Health*

The Elder constantly lived through the experience of the visitation of divine grace. Therefore, he constantly felt healthy, even though he was tried by long term physical illnesses. The Elder longed to make this experience of the ultimate victory, in Christ, of a healthy soul, over bodily illnesses, this entrance into the “earthly uncreated Church” of the Lord, a living reality for us by his words and by his life. The Elder suffered and therefore learnt of the divine. How can we give him the joy of knowing that we could accept, even in part, this mystical and soul saving message of his? It depends on how much we want to be open to divine grace, that is, on how much we “let Christ dwell in our soul” to use his expression.

### *The Pain of the Martyrs and the Elder’s Pain*

#### *The Pain of the Martyrs*

I always wondered how the martyrs were able to bear such terrible torture, without giving in and betraying their faith in Christ? When I was asked, I always gave a reasonable answer of course but I did not know if it was completely

gave a reasonable answer, of course, but I did not know if it was completely correct. On a visit to the Elder, he “caught” my question, before I could articulate it. While we were talking about some other matter, he suddenly asked me:

“When the Christian martyrs were tortured did they hurt, or not, what do you think?”

“I don’t know exactly, Elder, but I think the grace of God came, and limited the pain, so that they could endure to the end.”

“It’s not exactly like that,” he said. “The tortured martyrs were in a lot of pain, just like every normal person would be in pain, with the difference that they were continually joined to Christ in prayer. They received power from Him that was greater than their pain and so they were able to conquer it. But if they stopped praying, even for a moment, their pain became unbearable and they were ready to deny Christ. They, however, caught hold of prayer again, they got the power and endured until the Pain of their martyrdom until the end.”

#### The Elder’s Pain

This militant interpretation by the Elder impressed me. I thought it came from his divine enlightenment, seeing that he was not a martyr himself and would not have personal experience. The moment I thought that the Elder spoke again: “I’ll tell you a secret of mine, but don’t go spreading it around.”

“Agreed, Elder,” I said to him. Then he revealed the following:

“Once an lump appeared on the outside of my head and it bothered me a lot. I wanted it to removed with an operation, but without being given me any medicine, because it was not necessary. I went to a surgeon in the Polyclinic Hospital, and I said to him, “I want you to remove the lump from my head by burning it, but with out an anaesthetic. The doctor gave me a curious look. “And you’ll be able to stand the pain, father?” he asked me.

“I hope that I’ll be able to stand it,” I replied. Well, the operation took place, without anaesthetics. I was in great pain, but I prayed fervently the whole time. I was under the bleeding feet of Christ on the Cross, at Golgotha, and I begged him, that just as He endured so much pain, He would help me, the sinner, endure my own pain. In this way I withstood the pain, until the end of the operation, that went very well.” See! Even the Elder was a martyr! Then I thought, “Perhaps the Elder became a martyr with that impossible operation alone? Didn’t he endure all the terrible pain of his illnesses, which were travelling companions throughout his life? With his experience the Elder offered me tangible examples of how a soul, that is freed from the illness of sin, can gain strength from Christ dwelling within it. So much power, that it won’t bend under fierce pain, but over- comes it victoriously. Just like an eagle, with its strong wings, passes over the dark storm clouds and looks at the bright sun in a blue sky, flying

higher and higher.

[\[1\]](#) Canon of Supplication to the Mother of God.

## Publisher's Supplement V: Overcoming Pain

*A tape-recorded account of the Elder about a cautery [u](#) without an anaesthetic.*

### *Introduction*

The Elder's account, mentioned by the writer, above has been saved in a sound recording. We considered it correct to present it to you here so that you could have a more direct understanding of what the Elder actually said. Before the Elder says what you will read below, the person talking with him had read the life of a martyr or some form of hymn dedicated to a martyr. The Elder comments on it, explaining that the holy martyrs could stand the dreadful torture, which they were made to suffer, because they had given themselves over to the love of Christ with all their soul and all their mind.

In order to bear out this view of his, he relates a personal experience of his own.

By comparing the description of this experience that the author made from listening and remembering, with the description the Elder himself makes, one clearly sees how difficult it is for someone to convey faithfully such important details. These details give the Elder's account its own unique colour.

The account was recorded and is presented here a little after the point where the commentary on the martyr ends and the Elder's personal experience begins.

### *The Account*

Elder: He has his mind, his thoughts, his heart all given over to God.

Other: Indeed.

Elder: He was with great prayer and dedication. He was given over to God, united with Him. So, think it over, so that we can explain it... It is really beautiful.

Other: Yes, Elder, as soon as we finish I will remind you...

Elder: It is the Love of God and they lived in God even though ... they were [being tortured]

Other: Their body was tortured.

Elder: Yes. Yes, he said it very well... the point is that... let me tell you about something I lived through. I'm always ashamed to say it. but it is something that



something that I've always wanted to say, but I've seen something that I have seen.

Other: Indeed...

Elder: I felt it. Perhaps I've felt it at other times too, but I'll tell you about a certain incident. I've mentioned it before but you don't remember it. When they cut off a large, hard pea sized wart, which has grown on the top of my head.

Other: Yes.

Elder: You remember?

Other: No, you haven't told me about it...

Elder: I had a wart the size of a Spanish garbanzo. It was on the top, here... and it was hard... well, it was a wart and it had its stalk ... where its roots were, within my head...

Other: In the skin, yes.

Elder: Probably in the skin... Well... we had bought tickets with so-and-so... He came here a few times and loved me... and stuck... I started to love him too. I started to tell him about the desert and he tells me that he loves it too. So, we arranged to go to... the desert. Well, we went and got airplane tickets for early in the morning, the next day. We would leave on the first plane in order to catch the buses leaving for Ouranopolis.<sup>[2]</sup>

I had thought about getting rid of that wart, because I thought that over there in Kerasia [Mt. Athos] I would, of course, go outside, into the forest, under the sun, out in it all. You know, that those things are called carcinogenous. It was cancer.

Other: Yes...

Elder: Well then... those things do not want the sun, it makes them bad. So, I thought about going and having it removed. I waited for it to disappear on its own, it did n't disappear ... and I had to remove it with fire, not with a knife ...By searing. They put on the cautery iron, it goes red ... the cautery. You put it on and it burns, like meat burns... it burns it... Well... I went to a surgeon called Lekkos, Elias Lekkos. I say to him, "Doctor, I've got this..." He looked at it ... "Well," he says to me, "that's a serious thing... Why don't you leave it alone?"

"But doctor," I say, "it's better to leave it alone, but I'm going to the Holy Mountain..."

"What do you want with the Holy Mountain?" he says [he recounts this while laughing] "You shouldn't call it the Holy Mountain, it's not good..." I say to him, "I don't know what you think of it, but I like it there... Because I'll go there I'll go out into the forest, amongst the evergreens, in the jungle, because it really is a jungle there, in the sun, amongst it all and I know what I've got doesn't want sunshine, it makes it bad ... so I came for you to remove it..."

"Ah..." he says, "you've come too late. We haven't got anaesthetic or

anything.”

“It had passed twelve o’clock and our pharmacy<sup>[3]</sup> had closed. Even if it hadn’t closed it did not have anaesthetic, it had run out... and who would go out shopping... He says to me, “Come tomorrow.” I say, “Mr. Lekkos, I can’t tomorrow. I’ll be leaving for the Holy Mountain with the first airplane.”

“What am I going to do with you? Stay, and leave with the other one. Come first thing in the morning, we’ll get the anaesthetic and I’ll remove it...”

“No,” I say, “I don’t want to be put to sleep.”

“Well,” he says, “I’ll burn it off for you...”

“You’ll burn it off for me, yes...”

Well then... “Now, now, I can’t, it upsets me...”

“Why don’t you do the best thing,” he says... I say to him, “I don’t want to do such a thing, because it is not the best.”

“What things?” he replies.

I answer: “I say you should burn it off without an anaesthetic, without drugs...” He laughed. “It won’t work, father. You’ll jump right up there if, I put the cautery on you,” he says. “Do you know what it means to burn? Do you know what it means to roast? Why,” he says, “did tyrants burn the martyrs in the past? Because there is nothing more excruciating than having your body burnt... it is very painful,” he says, “you won’t be able to stand it...”

I say, “I’m sad. I don’t want to tempt God and it doesn’t seem good to me ... something that the doctor can do... why should I say that I will bear it with God’s grace, and then tempt God with that word... I’m ashamed,” I say to him, “however, I’m obliged to do it like this. I need to do it and I will do it, out of necessity.”

I say to him, “Do it for me as a favour...” and the doctor says, “You can’t... I’m telling you.” Well, “Do it for me as a favour,” said to him, “and I’ll cross myself”

“Now, you’re giving me a hard time,” I say...”I’ll start on you and then you’ll jump up and leave...” he says to me.

“Do it for me as a favour, and I’ll cross myself.”

That’s what I said I would do... So he calls, “Pandora...” Pandora comes along... “Go and bring me the cautery.” Well, Pandora went and brought it. He plugged it in. It’s an iron, like the ones we use for soldering...

Other: Yes, yes, yes, ... Like a solder, yes.

Elder: Yes. Well then... as we were saying... when he plugged it in he said, “Sit in the chair...” I sat down my hand inside my robes like that (slowly). I put it like this here.

Other: Yes. You crossed yourself.

“Elder: And the doctor didn’t see me... Inside my robes... as we were saying... and I crossed my hands, and as soon as it became red, all of a sudden, the doctor pricked me on top. I was calm. I had gathered myself together and I had gone to Golgotha and I knelt before Christ on the Cross ... and I saw him ... all, with the crown of thorns, with the nails in his hands and feet, with his side bleeding with the soldier’s spear and they were all bleeding... I saw that miracle while kneeling... I had knelt down.

Other: Yes.

Elder: And I lived through it... really strongly. I was at Golgotha. I'm telling you this, may God forgive me, say a prayer and the rest so that God will forgive me, for my big ego.

Other: But that's not your ego, Elder, it's a fact.

Elder: Well, it's not nice, I don't like it myself... I. want to say that he tried it out the first time, then he did it again, for a little while, and again a little, then he started... zzzzzzzzzzzzzz...

Other: zzz...

Elder: And flesh was burning... The room was flooded with the smell of roasting flesh... Eleni, please, could you open the window...? Well then, he was an atheist, a mason...

Other: Oh dear!

Elder: Well, he had told me himself... and he had some sort of position... I think... Well then ...he carried on... I was completely committed... My mind did not leave there at all! Soul, heart and mind, all there. I saw the Lord... I saw our Crucified Jesus! Kneeling before him, I saw him, and I was moved by his passion, by the nails and all that. I experienced it and I can tell you that it was the first time that I lived Golgotha so well, so vividly, so naturally... Well, he carried on and on. It can't be done all at once, all again and again.

Other: Of course, the cauterisation has to go down deep.

Elder: Not exactly deep, but the way he worked...

Other: Indeed...

Elder: He didn't give it a rest. He put that cautery like that until the end. He started to finish it up, so that the cautery would perhaps touch the bone, and I went like this...

Other: Yes, yes...

Elder: The poor thing... and the doctor shouts out... I shouldn't say this ... I'm very ashamed ... It's better not to say it.

Other: No, say it Elder, you've already said all the story... What did the doctor say?

Elder: He said a word that I didn't like at all... I did not like it at all... but

would I leave my thoughts, oh no! I had fixed myself on Christ. Do you understand? Well, Satan made him say that word..

Other: You mean he swore?

Elder: Well, he said something I didn't like. He shouted out, "Pandooooora, the priest is a...!" Do you get it? Well, in the end he put on, I don't know what, teramycin, teramycin painkiller.

Other: Yes, yes, yes, an antiseptic.

Elder: Yes. He put something like that on it... I don't know what it was.

Other: A gauze there and that...

Elder: Well, he covered it over like that... I got up and said to him, "Doctor, I thank you a lot. But I don't want to hide from you my sadness the moment that you shouted out, "Pandora, the priest's a yogi..." "Leave off the blasphemies," I say to him "Lord Jesus Christ... I'm an Orthodox Christian and I don't have any contact with those sort of people at all, I don't even know them... I know that they are people of the evil spirit..."

"Well," he said, "That's the way it came to me, and I said it... If you don't like it, of course you don't like it, but forgive me..."

"I forgive you," I say to him. Yet I, despite it bothering me ... it was a temptation, my boy. Ah, that wretched Satan! What do you know...! What... what a trap he set! I mean, if I spoke I would have lost the game... You can't talk... how can you talk... how! I was in God's splendour... Could I say anything? Yet, I want to tell you that I felt bad. Well, say that the bad word annoyed me a little. But it was not good!... Oh God, forgive me for saying it. Are you listening to me?

Other: The devil made him say that word there, to upset you ... to drive you away...

Elder: Yes, that's it, son... What did Satan tell him...?

I don't want to tell you. I'm ashamed...

Other: It'll be ... significant, Elder.

Elder: Yes, but what he says with all his soul.

Other: Yes, it's like what he said, what we heard in the Martyr's life...

Elder: Yes, yes ...It is just like he said... you cannot say that if you don't know about it...

Other: Yet, Elder, that doesn't happen haphazardly, by chance... it needs work...

Elder: Ah, it could be as you say. But now that I'm saying this, I'm feeling awful...

Other: How can one achieve that?

The Elder is silent.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Other: It needs great faith...

Elder: The gift is from God.

Other: It is grace, God's grace... it is a gift from God. If God's grace does not come, a person cannot achieve it...

Elder: Eh?

And then? Nothing Else.

We interrupt the presentation of the Elder's account here so that we can comment on all that follows.

The person talking with the Elder has asked him, "How can one achieve that?", i.e. to withstand pain. His answer, from the Elder, is characteristic silence. The Elder answers the other person's opinion that "great faith is needed" with polite disagreement. He simply says, "The gift is from God". That is to say, it is not only a matter of faith, you cannot just say, "I believe a lot" and therefore you'll withstand the pain.

The other person had previously said that it does not happen haphazardly and by chance, but that it "needs work". The Elder gave him the ambiguous answer that "it could be as you say". Following the Elder's answer "The gift is from God" he reflects and agrees that it is "God's grace, a gift from God"

However, the Elder has realised that the other person's acceptance of this agreement is superficial. The other person has not really taken in what kind of work is required and how that divine gift comes. In order to avoid any misunderstanding he tells another personal story, as was his habit, which seemed to be irrelevant.

Many people reading this story will ask themselves, what has it got to do with the previous account? Yet, the relevance is most profound, we could say mystical. With this second account, the Elder tries to transport the other person to a condition of spirit and soul that cannot be described. It is the condition that puts into practice the "offering of our whole lives to Christ God." It is the condition where one regards God in goodness and seeks him in simplicity of heart (Wisdom of Solomon 1:1). The person who moves towards the Kingdom of God without noticing it, because, "The Kingdom of God does not come with observation." It is the person whose internal left (the inner "old man") does not know what his internal right (the inner new man) is doing.

In other words (insofar as words can express a hidden mystical living experience) conquering pain is not something that a Christian can consciously and wilfully aim for. It is something that comes unexpectedly and is not the result aimed for, when someone gives their whole self over to Christ.

However, let us stop rambling about things we do not know about, and let us allow the Elder to speak, and tell us his lovely story.

### *Continuation of the Elder's Account*

Elder: Haven't I told you?

Other: No, Elder, I don't remember.

Elder: And then? Nothing else...

Other: Nothing else... Indeed... nothing. That however contains everything.

Elder: I'll sit up. Help me up, so I can tell you...

Other: Yes.

Elder: I had made a crate. I wanted to go up to the mountains, but I catch cold easily. Do you get it?

Other: Yes.

Elder: So I had to build a crate. It was seventy centimetres wide and underneath it was again seventy centimetres in height and it had one metre and eighty centimetres length...

Other: Yes.

Elder: It was a crate with a lid... it had... what are they called... knots.

Other: Yes.

Elder: One, two, three ... French.

Other: Indeed.

Elder: So... I had gone to a hill like that... or rather, like this... it was a hill... here was the edge... I went here, to the pine-trees... and I put...

Other: Whereabouts?

Elder: I'm telling you now.

Other: All right...

Elder: Have you heard of Chrystali's Spring?

Other: Yes, I've heard of it... but I don't know where it is, where it is ...

Elder: Well, below Chrystali's Spring, where there are pine trees...

Other: Yes...

Elder: Well, I had also put my clothes there. I put them inside and locked it, so that the shepherds would not steal them, and I left. I went and stayed there in the evenings... I slept on top of it, but, when it was not a good evening, I opened it, it was made like that. I lifted the lid to the side and supported it. I put my matting at the bottom, and slept inside.

Other: Yes.

Elder: Do you understand?

Other: Yes, yes, yes... inside the...

Elder: I had all these things on top, so that if it rained it didn't get wet inside ... and... do you understand?

Other: Yes...

Elder: Well then... and I liked it a lot. And as I told you that it was like that ...

I often said psalms in the evening, “the heaven of the heavens, all you stars of light,” and I don’t know what else. I looked up at the sky, and did such things. While praying I felt that... Well anyway... what time is it? ... and I lived like that... On top, when it was calm, and underneath, if it was cold or whatever... Beautiful...

Listen to what I’m telling you... A hiker passed by... He saw me and was jealous... And... I say to him, “How did you get up here?” He says that there are others and that they’ll all meet on the hill opposite. I can’t remember what it was called. He says to me, “I envy you a lot... Unfortunately,” he said, “I can’t do that... I’m tied down.

I have a family. Well you’ve reminded me of a poem by Chrystali.” I didn’t say anything to him... Then he started to leave...”Wait,” I said to him, “you’ve given me something to think about... What do you mean by ‘you’ve reminded me of a poem by Chrystali’”?

“Ah, well I’ll have to tell you it,” he says to me. I say “Tell me...”

“Ah, it is... it suits you a lot. Well he told it to me... “Ah,” I said to him, “I like it. Don’t you have a pen...”

“Certainly I have,” he says, and he pulls the thing out of there and writes it down and I learnt it, you see.

When ten days or so had passed, he came to see if I was up there, and I was... I said to him, “Sit down and I’ll tell you Chrystali’s poem<sup>[4]</sup>...” Well, I crossed myself...

*If only the pine-trees on the slope would give me  
From their branches innumerable a stack  
In a nook by them I would build  
My poor and deserted shack...*

*If only it were summer to give me  
Their leaves dry, to lay down upon  
In concert with them to whistle,  
Together with them their dawn song*

*And then? Nothing else  
And when my life, thus full of joy, would fade away  
They would give me a few branches yet again  
To make the bed where I would finally lay...*

(The Elder is moved)....

Other: Very beautiful.

Elder: They would give me a few branches yet again... A whole life in the spring of joy, the spring of life Why does He want you like that? To make you feel bliss...

Other: Yes.

Elder: To give you that magnificence, the divine... to feel within your soul, that... how does it go? With all...

Other: Your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength...

Elder: Everything to God. Whatever you have... Unite with God. Give it all to God. Open up to God. Into all my joints, my reins, my heart...

Other: Yes, like the prayer<sup>[5]</sup>.

Elder: And all Christians... And all the world, both those that believe and those that do not believe are consumed by this thing... separation from God.

Other: Indeed.

Elder: Separation from God brings loneliness... Do you get it?

Other: It brings depression, it brings this, and it brings that ... anxiety.

Elder: And when you deny a mystery ... just one mystery... So many doctors have become psychiatrists, psychoanalysts, psychologists and they receive patients... What patients, man, who are you to receive patients? In the end he goes: "What do you see, doctor?"

"There's nothing wrong with you... you are insecure..."

Other: What does being insecure mean?

Elder: "What does being insecure mean?"

"There's nothing wrong with you... Take this..." If you do not give yourself to God, what is that going to do to you? Today it is going to put you to sleep, tomorrow it could be even greater...

Other: Even stronger. That's what usually happens.

*Publisher's Comment:* Thus, when asked, "How can one achieve that?" i.e. How can one withstand pain, Elder Porphyrios gives the indirect answer, "Everything to God. Whatever you have... Unite with God." This, so that God's grace will go into the "joints, and reins, and heart."

End of Supplement

<sup>[1]</sup> a hot iron or caustic chemical used to burn, or sear tissue. From the Greek for burn. [Translator].

<sup>[2]</sup> Ouranopolis - (literally *Heaven City*) is the town closest to Mount Athos. It is the main port by which pilgrims enter the Holy Mountain. The Elder would fly to Thessaloniki and then take the public bus to Ouranopolis in order to get to Mt. Athos [Translator].

<sup>[3]</sup> The operation took place at the Polyclinic Hospital where Elder Porphyrios was the chaplain. This is why he says, "our pharmacy".



<sup>[4]</sup> The poem is in fact by *Lambros Porphyras*. The hiker probably attributed it to Chrystali and the Elder followed suit.

<sup>[5]</sup> From the Prayer of St. Symeon Metaphrastes in the Thanksgiving after Holy Communion. *(Translator)*.

## 10. PASTORAL GIFT

The pastoral art of Fr. Porphyrios was unrivalled. He had acquired the holiness of love and humility and God gave him the gift of knowing souls. “He saw” souls in all their length and breadth, and he knew how to touch upon their most sensitive points. The visitor who, through his own personal experience, would become aware of the Elder’s gift, was amazed and literally gave his whole soul over to him. He would become their spiritual guide. Someone would have to be exceptionally disbelieving in order not to be moved. Although they honestly want to help their flock, some spiritual guides trace, in most cases, the areas of their flock’s soul, which are unknown to them and dark. For this reason, they make mistakes and they hurt them, even if they did not want to do that. The Elder did not make mistakes. Except for very rare situations, where God allowed it to happen. This was because he saw souls clearly, he loved them and he served them with humility and self-sacrifice. Although I had one of the worthiest workers of the Lord’s vineyard as my spiritual father, from the first moment I saw Fr. Porphyrios, I saw the holy father who puts me completely at ease. He did not only put me at ease, but my spiritual father too. However, apart from my own experience relevant experiences from other people also exist.

### *Don’t Keep Her through Fear*

A worldly lady, who had tried out the attractions of the world and had eventually been disappointed by all of it, reached the point of suicide. A friend of hers found her in this state of despair, and she recommended Fr. Porphyrios as a way out. She went to Kallisia and met him. Unexpectedly, within the darkness of her soul, she saw, for the very first time in her life, a comforting light shining. She was filled with enthusiasm and became his disciple. She asked his blessing to live near him, like St. Peter the Apostle at the Transfiguration of the Saviour, who said, “Lord, it is good for us to be here” (Matt. 17:4). The Elder provided some accommodation for her with the sisters of the monastery. She spent her

days there with serenity of soul and she felt that she “was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found” (Lk. 15:32).

But the nasty devil did not give up his malicious work. He was envious of that soul, who had literally escaped from his clutches and he resolved to win her back. He made her imagine glossed over memories of her old life, within the bright lights of worldly entertainment and she compared it with the destitute wilderness, where she was now living. Little by little, boredom started to poison her. The demon of listlessness gnawed at her soul in secret. Until, one day, she announces to the sisters that she wanted to return to Athens.

They were troubled and tried to stop her, telling her that after the terrible adventure she had been through her return to that past hell, would mean that she wilfully gave herself over to death. The lady hesitated about leaving. However, some days later she restated her desire to depart from the monastery. All the sisters were concerned, and they informed the Elder. He asked them, “What did you all say?”

“To stay here, because if she leaves she will be in danger.”

“It was wrong of you to tell her to stay,” the Elder said. “You must allow her to leave, because that is what she wants. Don’t keep her through fear. Do you want to drive her mad? Don’t be afraid. That soul will not be lost She will come back again.”

The next time the lady mentioned it, the sisters told her that she was free to do whatever she wanted. She said goodbye to them, got the Elder’s blessing and left for Athens. Her old company welcomed her return with real celebration. The Elder prayed for her salvation, in secret. The lady returned to a life of extravagance, but was soon saved by the snakes of despair. Dark thoughts troubled her. Only, now the darkness was not the only thing there, unlike before. Now there was a comforting light with the Elder. Thus, the little bird escaped the devil’s snare and flew away free, to the heavens at Kallisia. The Elder welcomed her with loving care and joy, just like the father of the prodigal son. From then on, she never asked to return to her old life ever again. She changed completely, and started a new life of repentance and peace of soul.

### *Prayer and Not Reproach*

One Sunday morning the Elder went down to a village church, together with an elderly peasant that he knew. On the way, they met a group of six or seven youths going in the opposite direction. The peasant asked the youths, “Where are you going, kids?” They answered, “To the cafe”. Then the peasant, who was very strict, became indignant and said: “You should be ashamed of selves! It’s

Sunday and instead of going to Church, you're on your way to the cafe! What kind of Christians are you?" He then let loose a fanatical open-air sermon on them. The youths swore at him and went on their way. The Elder was silent. The peasant, full of rage and self-satisfaction, said to the Elder, "I sorted those bad lads out very well." Then the Elder said, "You did not do well." The peasant, who expected congratulations, was embittered by the Elder's answer. They arrived at the church, the Elder went into the sanctuary and the peasant took his place in the main church. Not half an hour had passed when - what would you know! - the whole gang of youths turned up in Church. The villager rubbed his hands in satisfaction. As soon as the Divine Liturgy ended and the Elder left the sanctuary the peasant rushed to meet him. He showed him the youths, saying, "Do you see how you said that I didn't do well? They thought about my words and they came to Church?" The Elder smiled and explained that they came to Church because he had prayed for them in silence, and not because they had been influenced by the peasant's behaviour.

### *When I Haven't Eaten, I Understand Better*

I protested to the Elder, one afternoon, because he had been seeing people all day, without a break, not even to put a morsel of food in his mouth. "Elder, please forgive me for being so bold as to give you advice, having no idea at all about spiritual matters, but I think that at this rate, you'll get sick. Why don't you rest a little, at least to eat something, and then, if you are feeling up to it, carry on?" The Elder replied, "Because when I haven't eaten, I understand a person's soul better."

### *The More You Nag, the Later He Returns*

The wife of a disabled doctor was in despair. Her husband had acquired some very bad habits. After finishing work at the hospital he went to the cafe and came home after midnight. This left her and the children alone for most of the day, and they hardly ever saw him. She protested. She spoke to him harshly, and he reacted by returning home even later. She had reached a deadlock. She heard about Fr. Porphyrios and hurried to meet him.

When she arrived at Kallisia, the sick Elder was very tired and it was impossible for him to carry on. A crowd of people was waiting outside. When the lady arrived, she found out that the Elder had stopped meeting people, and she was sad. She asked a friend of mine, who knew the family, what she could do. My friend advised her to dare to ask simply for the Elder's blessing, given

that just his blessing had worked miracles. The lady approached anxiously. She did not manage reach the step leading to the Elder's cell when she heard his voice: "You can come in". The Elder "caught" the lady's anxiety. Despite his own exhaustion, he decided that it was necessary to help her storm-tossed family. He received her as a "spiritual exception". When the lady left the Elder's cell her face shone with joy. She divulged the following to us:

"The Elder revealed everything to me. He said to me, "I see that your husband is good, but he's got a complex, because of his disability. This is why he stays out late, in order to forget about it. Because you nag him continually, he doesn't want to come home, and comes back late. The more you nag him, the later he returns. Now, you'll do the opposite. The later he returns, the more you'll pray for him, you'll love him, and you'll take care of him. In this way, he'll gradually change and he will become more and more drawn to his home, to his wife and to his children. Then, your problem will be solved." The lady talked to herself, as if she had just woken up from a bad dream, "How silly I was for so long! I was going to destroy my family with my nagging, and I didn't even realise it." She followed the Elder's instructions faithfully, and, in a very short while, won her husband back.

### *Heavenly Reward*

An unlettered spiritual daughter of the Elder's told me the following: "One summer morning he sent me to clear up some weeds from the garden. I got the hoe and started to dig. The sun was high up and burning. I became very tired, I was fed up with digging, and I threw the hoe aside. I sat down under a tree, feeling sad, because I had given up on my work in the middle. A little later, I heard a light noise. I turn around, and I see the Elder. He came and sat next to me and started to tell me some lovely stories. When he finished he said, "I sent you to work, so that you could earn your heavenly reward today. As soon as I "saw" that you had become tired and given up, I came to console you, so that you would gain the courage to continue your work, so that you wouldn't lose your heavenly reward."

### *Our Junk*

The same lady remembered the following: "Once the Elder said to me, "Many of you women go and throw away whatever broken and useless thing you've got - old pans with holes in them, furniture, shoes and other worn out things. You put them in some storeroom out of the way. Then you lock the door and forget about them. But you don't know that the moment will come when that junk will

about them. But you don't know that the moment will come when that junk will be found and you'll be exposed."

I was amazed by the Elder's words. At the time, I was reading books on pastoral psychology, which spoke about the repression of traumatic life-experiences from the conscious to the subconscious of the psyche, and of their re-emergence at an unexpected time. The Elder's vivid example of the storeroom full of junk told me a lot more than all the scientific handbooks.

The symbolism was more than clear. It referred to our sins, which we have not wiped out through our repentance and confession. Instead, we've hurriedly chucked them into the storeroom of forgetfulness, in order to escape their annoying presence. God will "find" them, and bring them back to mind, on the day of judgement. He already knows it, while we are ignorant of it.

### *The Poor Orphans*

We were a company of people and the Elder was chatting with us. He talked to us about the absence of love in our time, which creates loneliness, depression, insecurity, anxiety and fears. He said, "Drag yourself along to an orphanage. Go and see those poor orphans, how they act like little lambs that have lost their mother. They look for whatever visitor will show them a little love, and go and cling to them and won't leave them alone. Drag yourself along, and see how they thirst for love." He concluded, "But do you think that children who have their parents, but are not loved by them, are any different from orphans? They are orphans too."

### *You Don't Gain Anything with Harshness*

A friend revealed to me that he had been on the receiving end of harsh behaviour, from some people with strict principles. The result was that he was completely humiliated and totally misunderstood with regard to his character. The Elder put him at ease. He put things in their place, by carrying out a successful x-ray of his soul. He said to him, "You are good, sensitive, calm, one of God's sheep. But, when they treat you harshly, you recoil, you react internally. That's when they misinterpret you a lot and they do not understand you. But when they treat you kindly, you reveal such good things from within yourself, that you surprise others. The people who misunderstand you and who hurt you do not even know the old story about the wind and the sun."

The Wind and the Sun had an argument about who was the strongest. At the time, a certain shepherd was walking up the mountain. They laid a bet that whoever could remove his cape was the strongest. The Wind blew and he blew,

but the shepherd became cold and wrapped himself up in his cape even more tightly. Then the Sun came out from behind the clouds and shed goodness and warmth. The shepherd became hot, and took off his cape.

Then the Sun shouted to the Wind, “Do you see who is the strongest of the two of us?” Then Fr. Porphyrios concluded, “You don’t win people over with harshness, but only with goodness.” Then my friend realised that those people of “strict principles” were like a harsh and icy wind, whereas Fr. Porphyrios was the good-natured and warm sun.

### *You Can Even Become Holy in Omonia Square<sup>11</sup>*

We went to see the Elder with a friend who was a doctor. The doctor had exceptional virtues of soul, but kept a cautious stance with regard to Christian life. On the way I talked to him about the immediate necessity of living the life in Christ from now, willingly and conscientiously, because that is our greatest interest. He agreed, in general, but insisted that it called for a minimum of spiritual requirements, that he himself did not have.

When we arrived the Elder received both of us in his cell, together. He told us some wonderful things that interested the doctor professionally. I was impressed, because although it was the first time that he met my friend, he found the pulse of his soul from the very beginning. He spoke to him as if he had known him since childhood. The friend was impressed by the Elder’s clairvoyance. He was unable to hide his joy.

At some point, I mentioned the matter we had talked about on the way, and had disagreed upon. Then the Elder used the occasion to present most convincing arguments about the benefit, and possibility, of living the Christian life, in all places and at all times. I remember the conclusion that he addressed to the doctor, “Do you know, my dear, somebody who wants to, can even become holy in Omonia?” Finally, the doctor was convinced after talking to him for five minutes, whereas I had not been able to manage it after talking to him for a whole hour. How could he not convince him, since his final conclusion was not some theoretical invention of his? Rather, it was the fruit of his own personal experience, since he lived a holy life, for thirty whole years as chaplain to the Chapel of St. Gerasimos, at the Polyclinic General Hospital, in Omonia Square. How could he not convince him, since his whole life was an upward journey to holiness?

When we returned to Athens my friend asked that we visit the Elder again at the earliest opportunity. Then we said good-bye. I left for my house and he left for his office, which was close to Omonia Square. When the Elder said to him,

“Somebody, who wants to, can even become holy in Omonia.” He meant it both metaphorically and in actuality. Naturally, this was without anybody having told him where the doctor worked.

### *The Cheerful Climate in the Elder's Courtyard*

The Elder's pastoral care functioned secretly, not only when he spoke to visitors in his cell, but also when they were simply waiting in his courtyard to see him. Even from my first visit, I observed the cheerful climate that prevailed in the Elder's courtyard between people who met for the first time. I would call it a climate that exemplified the soul's resurrection. In the beginning, I thought that it was just my own personal impression. Later, I checked this with the impressions of many other visitors who had exactly the same feeling as I did and who expressed it in nearly the same words.

### *Come Whenever You Want To*

One day, as we were chatting in his cell, and he was sick, I asked him, “Perhaps it would be preferable to come and see you, less frequently, so that, I at least, won't disturb you so often.” The Elder retorted immediately, “No, come whenever you want to. If I am able, we'll talk, and if I am unable, I'll just give you my blessing. Come and take in the air here.” However, I quickly realised that by going to the Elder I did not only avoid the pollution of Athens, by breathing in the pure oxygen in the woods. More importantly, by visiting the Elder, I breathed in the spiritual oxygen of his holiness, that had sanctified even the buildings, the trees, the birds, the wild flowers, the earth and the whole of surrounding nature. We had become used to going to the monastery regularly, and we liked it. Whether our spiritual shepherd was there or not the sheep returned to the fold on their own, where they felt safe, regardless of whether he was there or not. Just the view of the Elder's monastery secretly gave us a feeling of safety and peace of soul.

### *When Separation is the Lesser Evil*

The Elder sometimes guided his spiritual children in a painful manner, when he considered it spiritually necessary. He told one spiritual daughter whose husband had just died, “Now you must separate from your Mother-in-law. Since she has other children, let her go and live with one of her children. Because, if you live together I see that from her bitterness she'll turn your children against you. Therefore, she will sin greatly and put your soul and that of your children's



you. Therefore, she will sin greatly and put your soul and that of your children in spiritual danger. In the end, you'll be obliged to throw her out by quarrelling. Whereas now she can leave trouble-free. You'll both be a lot less upset. Help her from a distance, as much as you can both financially, but most of all, through prayer. We priests have a mission, to bring people together, but when this creates spiritual harm, separation is the lesser evil."

His spiritual daughter carried out his advice in time. His words were soon born out by the events that followed. Of course, this was not a general piece of advice, but a particular piece of advice given to a particular person.

### *Love Covers Everything*

Someone asked the Elder who they should vote for in the parliamentary elections. He answered with a parable: "The Orthodox Church is like a Mother Hen. Under her wings she covers white chicks, and black chicks, and yellow chicks and every colour of chicks." The person asking the question got the right answer: The Orthodox Church is not politicised, even more so, it does not support one party or another. It covers everyone with love, without being identified with factions.

### *Accused by Conscience*

Once the Elder was travelling from Thessaloniki to Ierisso, on the way to the Holy Mountain. When he arrived at the bus station, a seat could not be found for him on the bus. He was obliged to travel standing, while some youths were sitting down by him, joking between themselves. An elderly gentleman admonished the youths, because they saw an aged hieromonk standing up, and they stayed in their seats, indifferently. He suggested that one of them give up his seat for the priest, they stayed in their seats unmoved, and motionless. Then the gentleman, full of rage, got up and offered his own seat to the Elder. The Elder thanked him, but did not take his seat. He travelled standing up all the way to Ierisso<sup>[2]</sup>. At the end of the journey the gentleman asked the Elder why he did not take up the seat he had offered him. The Elder said, "You didn't do the right thing by telling the kids off. They acted badly: They left an elderly hieromonk standing and they didn't offer him their seat of their own accord, as they should have<sup>[3]</sup>. Following that, if they had got up, after you had chastised them and I sat in their seat, or if I accepted the seat that you offered me, the kids would not have realised that they acted badly. On the contrary, they would feel justified. However, now having been standing up for so long, and seeing me in front of

them, their own conscience has got up, and accused them in silence for the way they acted. A person can only be saved like that, when he repents, not because someone has accused him externally, but because his conscience has accused him internally.”

### *Now I've Given Myself Up*

A friend divulged his thoughts to the Elder. “Elder,” he said, “I’m concerned about my old age, and I ask that God does not allow me to be a burden to relatives or other people.” The Elder laughed saying, “You know, I said the same thing when I was young, but now I’ve given myself up.”

### *As a Spiritual Father, I've Got Experience*

The vigil at St. Nicholas at Kallisia had ended. I was sitting on the rocks and gazing at the hills beyond and the outstanding colours in the sky, as an August dawn was breaking in a reddish hue, and the magnificence of God became clearer and clearer. A little further on, the Elder was talking, in a low voice, to an elderly lady. It seems that the lady was distrusting and was having difficulty in accepting everything the Elder had been telling her for so long. Then, at one point his voice was raised and he could clearly be heard saying, “Listen to what I am telling you. That’s the way things are, as I’m telling you. Having been a spiritual father for so many years I have experience of people.” With the gifts he had received, the Elder could have surprised the lady with revelations beyond reason. However, instead of gaining her trust like that, he preferred to use the time consuming method of convincing her by reason. He knows the reason why, as a grace- filled spiritual father.

### *The Second Piece of Advice*

When a visitor did not accept the Elder’s first piece of advice, he took it back and gave them a second piece of advice, which was easier. However, his first piece of advice was always more spiritually advantageous.

### *In the Cold*

One wintry morning, a good friend put me in terrible temptation: He suggested that we go to the Elder, with his car. However, the Elder had given me instructions to guard myself against the cold, following my adventure with the heart attack. The thermometer was below zero, the mountains around us were

heart attack. The thermometer was below zero, the mountains around us were covered in snow, and it was snowing lightly in Athens. A strong icy wind was blowing, which froze everything. But his warm spiritual sun drew me near. I hesitated a little, and then I decided to go. I dressed myself up very warmly and a group of us set off.

When we arrived at the Elder's cell not one visitor was there. It was completely deserted; one could not see even one bird flying between the trees. The Elder gave his blessing for us all to enter his cell together. He received his winter visitors with joy. They kissed his hand one by one. I went in last. As soon as he saw me he said to me in surprise, "And you, kid, what are you doing here on a day like this? Didn't I tell you not to leave your house when it's very cold?" In vain, I tried to justify myself. He deemed my trip away from home to be unjustifiable. He spoke to us for quite a while and was in a very good mood. Our faces had reddened with joy and from the heat of the burning wood crackling in the stove that the Elder had built. He broke off his enjoyable narrative more than three times, to comment on my presence there with charming paternal rebukes, "And you've got him over there, coming to see me on such a day. Why did you get up, kid, and come out in such terrible cold? Is that what I told you to do?"

I laughed, without having consciously realized that I had put my health in danger. However, I realised that I did not have an excuse; my action was irrational. The Elder's blessing protected me from the icy cold of that day. His discerning love also forgave my disobedience, which was motivated by my love, without discernment, for him.

### *You've Lost Your Own Self*

A lady who was plunged into despair about the death of her husband timidly entered the Elder's cell. Her first words were: "Elder, I've lost my husband and I'm in despair." The Elder replied, "You've lost your own self, because you've lost your faith. You haven't lost your husband, he was God's and He took him; just like he'll take all of us. I see that from all your sadness, you've become melancholic and you've created problems not just for yourself, but for your children, too. They've been hurt by seeing you weeping every day inconsolably." He comforted her, with practical advice about facing her problems. He imparted her with faith in God and the hope of seeing her husband in heaven.

### *Go to the Holy Mountain*

The Elder did not claim exclusivity for his pastoral work. He was open to

every person of God. Once I spoke to him about Fr. P. with wonder. I had heard about him from friends' accounts or from typewritten conversations of his. Fr. Porphyrios spoke about Fr. P. with great love, and concluded, "Drag yourself along, kid, go to the Holy Mountain and see Fr. P." He then added, "Fr. P. and I are the same." I fastened on to his last phrase and said to him, "If you're that same as Fr. P. why should I wear myself out, going to the Holy Mountain, to meet him? I see you and it's the same thing." The Elder reacted, "No, kid, don't put it like that. I didn't say that so that you wouldn't go. Go to the Holy Mountain and see Fr. P."

### *Three Days of Prayer and Fasting*

The Elder did not limit himself to giving advice about love. He sacrificed himself for the love that he taught. Once he confronted a difficult personal problem of mine, with the co-operation of an exceptional friend. At one crucial stage, where God should speak clearly through events, he rang out a call to pray and fasting. He informed my friend and I that on three particular days in a row we would pray fervently, and keep a strict fast. That is what happened, and God spoke by the events that followed. I marvelled at the Elder's spirit of self-sacrifice. I also felt particular gratitude towards him, because he had prayed for me especially and kept a strict three-day fast for my sake, despite his delicate health. I felt the same gratitude towards my exceptional friend and spiritual child of the Elder.

### *Jeanne d'Arc and Zandac*

A spiritual daughter of the Elder told him about her troubles from intense stomach disturbances. He felt sorry for her and was most willing to help her. He told her that her condition was of a psychological nature and advised her to take some medicine, but he could not remember its name. Despite that he tried hard to remember its name. He told her that it was like the name of a French national heroine. The girl said to him, "Perhaps you are talking about Jeanne d'Arc, Elder?" The Elder replied, "Yes, kid, I'm talking about her. The name of the medicine is like her name" (He was talking about Zandac - which has a similar pronunciation in Greek). The Elder's learning impressed the young lady. He even knew about Joan of Arc.

### *Look After Your Health*

One day he asked a friend of mine, who was visiting him, “How’s your friend doing? As soon as you arrive in Athens call him and tell him that the Elder advises you to look after your health, not to get tired and not to be sad.” I was moved by my friend’s telephone call with advice from the Elder. I really had become very tired during those days and I was sad. The Elder shepherded his sheep even from a distance.

### *Opinions about Spiritual Fathers*

It was sometimes necessary to ask him about priests who were spiritual fathers. This was because various acquaintances had asked for my opinion before going to confess to them. The Elder often answered positively, only a few times did he say: “I don’t know”. The Elder respected everyone’s personality and expressed himself with much discretion, especially with regard to bishops, priests and, indeed, spiritual fathers.

### *Demand That Was Not Heard*

A doctor friend visited the Elder at Kallisia for the first time. He was sick that day and was not receiving visitors. He was only giving his blessing. My friend went into his cell and said that he would very much like to discuss an important personal matter with him. The Elder gave him his blessing and said that he could not talk to him. He said that the discussion would take place another time. The doctor insisted saying that he was a friend of mine. The Elder did not appear to be moved by this, and said that he was sick. The doctor then took the opportunity to tell him that he was a pathologist and willing to help him. The Elder thanked him and told him that he did not need medical attention. My friend returned to Athens empty handed and annoyed. “Just listen to that,” he said to me, “I present him with three different arguments and he rejects them all, with total indifference. Don’t talk to me about the Elder ever again, there is no way that I’m going back there.” Knowing his personality and bearing in mind similar cases I said with certainty, “You’ll go back there, you’ll get to know him and then I’ll be seeing you again.” Indeed, he went again, he found him, and he discussed his problem with him and returned full of enthusiasm.

From that day on, he became a regular visitor of the Elder.

### *The Secret War Against the Faith*

I was discussing heresies with the Elder one-day and he told me the following, “Once a very good girl came to see me. She was educated from a good home

Once a very good girl came to see me. She was educated, from a good home, and a Christian, indeed, she went to a Christian group. She told me that a marriage had been proposed for her with a good gentleman, serious, rich, educated, the only thing was, he was a mason. She started to tell me that he had a very good character, and for that reason, she would draw him towards Christ. I told her that she would not be able to achieve anything. She didn't listen to me and she married him. From then on, she did not visit me for many years. Until, one day, she arrived with her husband and her child. She entered my cell alone. I asked her, "How are you doing?"

She said, "fine".

"How often do you go to confession and take holy communion?"

"About once a year".

"How often do you go to Church?"

"Now and then, occasionally."

I asked her a few more things and received similar answers. I said to her, "Call your husband". Her husband came with their child. I said to her husband, "You know, your wife, before she married you, assured me that she would make you a Christian, but I see that you have made her a Mason."

"Elder," I asked, "how did that woman believe that she would make the Mason a Christian? Since Freemasonry has declared open war on Christianity?" He replied, "No, that war is waged by others. The Masons carry out secret warfare. That is why they are dangerous. They don't tell you not to cross yourself, not to go to Church, not to go to confession. They tell you to go to Church, but also to go to them. They influence you little by little, so that from some point on you have stopped really being a Christian and you've become a Mason."

The Elder did not only know the contents of heresies, but he also knew the devil's methods. He warned Christians so that they would not be trapped and be beaten in their struggle "against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12).

### *The Rude Visitor*

The Elder explained to me that because of his illness he was not able to prearrange meetings with his visitors as they wished. For this reason he was obliged to receive people, when he could, as many as he could, and for as long as he could. He told me about the following incident: "I was sick and I couldn't receive people at all. A lady came into my cell and insisted that we talk. I told her that I couldn't because I was sick. Then she opened her mouth. as we were

saying, and started to run me down, because she had come, she said, from a long way away, she had become tired and she had spent plenty of money. “You blessed thing, “I say to her, “did I invite you to come, and then stand you up? You can see that I am unable to see you, what do you want me to do?” She carried on with her complaints. What can you say?”

Indeed, what can a holy man in pain from illness say when put under pressure by selfish irrationality? He prefers to be silent, with gentleness and leniency.

I was informed that in the past, when the Elder was in a hospital bed recovering from a kidney operation, a lady who wanted to discuss her problems with him visited him. This, while he was suffering in great pain following the surgery performed. How far can lack of feeling that comes from our selfish individualism go?

### *Love Towards the Elder Benefits the Visitor*

An acquaintance of mine, who was going through a serious trial, wanted to meet the Elder. The meeting was a turning point in his life. Although he went into his cell with many doubts and reservations, he came out transfigured. A few days later I also visited him and amongst other things, I mentioned the favourable change that had occurred in my acquaintance’s problem, after their meeting. Then the Elder revealed to me: “In the beginning he was reserved, however, I spoke within his soul and at one moment I realised that he loved me.” When the Elder said this his face shone with joy. He went on to explain, “I’m not glad so much for myself, but for him, because he’ll benefit spiritually now that he loves me.” Really, my acquaintance devoted himself to the Elder and all his life changed for the better. The Elder, as a good shepherd was not content with winning, in Christ, the love of that man but he took care to watch over him. He said, “His trust and love for me should not be shaken, because he will suffer spiritual and material damage.”

### *Dialogue of Spiritual Fathers*

The messages that my Spiritual Father and the Elder exchanged were charming. I passed them on with great pleasure. I remember some of them:

Spiritual Father: Pray, Elder, for me, I am sick.

Elder: I, the sinner, humbly pray that God blesses you.

Spiritual Father: I return your wishes using the psalms, that “your youth is renewed like the eagle’s”

Elder: A smile in silence.

On another occasion:

Elder: “How is your spiritual father? How can he live in all that pollution?”

Spiritual Father: Please, Fr. Porphyrios, pray, that God turns the thick pollution in the neighbourhood where I live to the pure oxygen of Mount Parnis.

Elder: Shakes his head, sadly, and does not speak.

One day the Elder said to me, “your spiritual father is very good, and very educated. I, you see, could not get an education. On the Holy Mountain I worked with my hands.” He said that with sorrow. I passed this on to my spiritual father and I asked him, “Why does Fr. Porphyrios need scholarly learning, when he has spiritual learning? He did not have University teachers on the Holy Mountain, but he had God Himself as a teacher, Who taught him things that no University could ever teach him.” My spiritual father agreed.

### *Wisdom or Clairvoyance*

Once, I found myself in a dilemma, between solution A and solution B. It seemed as though solution A was according to God’s will, however, there was some faint suspicion that perhaps B was instead. Since I was going to confession that day I thought that before I did anything I should get a blessing for solution A. I mentioned the matter and my spiritual father immediately replied, “Of course solution B is more in accordance with God’s will.” I was impressed, once again, with his sharp pastoral discernment.

The next time I met the Elder I mentioned the incident to him. He was amazed and said, “Is that how your spiritual father replied? He immediately found that solution B was according to God’s will? Your spiritual father is wise. I know what I am saying. It is better to listen to someone who is wise, rather than someone who is clairvoyant.” When I returned to Athens, I related this to my spiritual father and he replied, “Tell Fr. Porphyrios that in my opinion it is better to listen to the clairvoyant rather than the wise.” As soon as I conveyed this to Fr. Porphyrios, he laughed with a saintly smile.

Now that both have departed for the heavens, I consider what a significant spiritual pastor God granted me, without ever having becoming consciously aware of it, to the extent that I should. I am often sad about that. But I am comforted by Fr. Porphyrios’s affirmation about my spiritual father, that “He lived in Christ. He went to Christ.” Also, with the certainty that Fr. Porphyrios went to Christ, too. Now, both of them, with God, pray, with much love, for us sinners.



## *The Minister and His Aide*

The Elder's pastoral care extended to areas that were unapproachable for many. One of his spiritual children was in a dilemma: Should he help a friend of his, who was in a high position, and asked to work together with him, or not? He turned to the Elder. Despite his initial reservations, that Elder gave his blessing to work together with him, with the excuse that, "There should be a few people that advise officials correctly. They'll be like the salt that stops the rot. Without the salt the rot will set in sooner." Then again, he did not stop there. He foresaw that other people, who were opposed, would interfere and confuse matters. They would make their co-operation impossible, so that he would be obliged to leave. However, the official would also be obliged to leave his position in a short while, because those above him would deviate from the Greek Orthodox tradition. In a few months, the Elder's predictions came completely true.

## *Mixed-Up Politicians*

He once asked me how politics was going. I answered that in general things were not going well. Then the Elder answered, "Well, what can politicians do for you? They are mixed up by the passions in their soul. When a person cannot help himself, how can he help others? We are also to blame for this situation. If we were true Christians we could send to Parliament, not a Christian party, of course, but Christian politicians and things would be different.

## *Let Him Stand, to Pay*

There was a group of us sitting around the Elder, who was teaching us in his own unprecedented manner. Only one of us, known for his pride, did not find a seat, and remained standing. I suggested to the Elder that we also find him a place to sit. The Elder surprised us with an unusual expression, "Leave him there standing, in order to pay." The Elder "saw" that man's passion in his soul and found his required penance with great readiness.

## *Trust in God's Providence*

One summer afternoon, the Elder, sitting under a pine-tree, told us about the immeasurable trust that we should have in the Providence of God, "Do you know what Scripture says about "the hairs of our head being numbered," well that's a reality. It's just like that. Nothing in our life is by chance. God takes care

of the tiniest details of our life. He is not indifferent to us. We are not alone in the work. He loves us a lot, and he bears us in mind at every moment and protects us. We must realise this, and not be afraid of anything.”

### *Without Grace*

Another time he said to us, “We must acquire God’s grace from now. Without God’s grace, our efforts will not bring results and we won’t go to Paradise. God gives us his grace when we are humble.” This shows how much the Elder lived within the Church tradition and agreed completely with the Fathers. He lived the Lord’s words, “without Me you can do nothing,” which the Council of Carthage understood with its 114 canon which says that, “without God we cannot fulfil any good”.

### *Idleness and Despair*

Regarding a person who lived far away, and whom he had never met, when the Elder was asked, he said, “I see that since he doesn’t work, he’s idle, he’s lazy and that’s why he is in despair.” His diagnosis corresponded completely to reality. If something had to be done to face the despair, it should begin with work.

### *Flowers and Thorns*

The Elder presented us with the secrets of spiritual struggle in a simple and understandable manner. He said to us, “What is the Christian struggle? Well, the soul is a garden divided into two parts. In one half thorns grow, and in the other half flowers. We have a tank of water (the powers of the soul) with two taps with two pipes. One directs the water towards the thorns and the other towards the flowers. I can only open one tap at a time. I leave the thorns unwatered and they wither; I water the flowers and they bloom.” The Elder didn’t talk about the one-sided demonisation or angelification of the soul. He saw it as it really is, influenced both by demons and by angels. He did not want to see the Christian labouring only negatively, only by uprooting thorns. He wanted to see him labouring positively, only occupying himself with watering the flowers. This was because this labour caused the flowers - the angelic virtues- to bloom and at the same time made the thorns - the demonic passions -wither.

### *The Light Drives Out the Darkness*

On another occasion, he said to us, “Why should we chase away darkness? We’ll turn on a light and the darkness will go away on its own. We’ll let Christ dwell throughout our soul and the demons will flee on their own.” The vivid images that the Elder used made a lively impression on us.

On the way back, we commented on his revelations with enthusiasm, and, of course, without having fully understood them. We kept to the surface of our expressed imaginings, while he went on to the depths of his inexpressible experience of the Holy Spirit. When he said, “We’ll let Christ dwell throughout our soul and the demons will flee on their own.” he did not imagine some hypothetical possibility, like we did. He actually lived this very real state.

### *Accepting a Gift, Out of Love*

I believed that everything given by a fellow human being, should have moral worth in itself that cannot be equated with any sort of gift in return at all. Otherwise, I believed that they would not sink down to the level of contractual bargains in a spiritual cloak. Consequently I was apprehensive about accepting things offered, even from friends. This hurt them, without me wanting it. The Elder “saw” this weakness of mine. Despite its supposed ideals, it hid elements of refined pride. He wanted to transfigure it.

While I had never mentioned the matter, one day during a discussion, he suddenly said, “You know, when they offer you something out of love, you must accept it.” It was a direct and well-aimed intervention of his. This reminded me of a phrase that had moved me when I was a teenager, “Futility, whatever you take with self-centred-ness. Eternity, whatever you give with love. The best eternity is whatever you receive with love, so that you can give the joy of giving back in return to the person who offers you something out of love.”

An old ideal had been deeply hidden in the past and in the depths of the soul. It had suffered and become confused in practice. Despite this, the Elder’s “spiritual receiver” had picked up on and had brought it to the surface. The Elder simplified it and purified it of intrusive elements. Thus, love in Christ would sanctify both the act of giving and the accepting it according to the Apostle’s words, “Owe no one anything, except to love one another” (Rom. 13:8). The Lord’s saying, “Love one another” is the only life-long unsettled debt that each one of us owes.

### *You’ll Decide On Your Own*

The Elder’s answer to some questions put to him sometimes were like a cold

shower, such as, “You’ll see on your own, and decide, based on your own responsibility.” But seeing your weakness, and before the devil red against you with agitation and despair, he came to your aid. Indirectly, yet clearly, he gave you the essentials that directed you towards the correct decision.

Like a good mother who brings her child up to face life’s difficulties, from time to time, he left us in the deep end keeping close by us in his boat. This in order to test our ability to act by ourselves, yet ready at any given moment to rush to help us. The Elder had an objective aim, to detach us from him, in order to attach us to Christ, so that we could decide as those “face to Face” with His enlightenment and strength. This did not mean our separation from the Elder, but a closer union of soul with him, through Christ.

### *God’s Answers are Not by Chance*

The Elder wanted us to study the scriptures. He wanted us to do this with responsibility and seriousness. He said, “When you’ve got some problem don’t open up the Gospel by chance to see if you’ve found God’s answer to your problem on the page you’ve opened. That’s not right. God’s answers aren’t given by chance.”

### *Grant Unto Them*

The blessings that the Elder gave us were very expressive. Once I was in his cell, with an exceptional friend, who loved the Elder greatly. Having given us much advice about our problems at the end he made us kneel, and lifting his hands up he said the following prayer, “Lord Jesus Christ, grant them the fulfilment of their desires that are pleasing to Thee, according to the heart of each so that they, through their good deeds, may reimburse the gratitude they owe Thee.”

On another visit, with three friends, he received us all together, and at the end of the discussion told us to kneel. He put his stole on, laid it on our heads and said a prayer. I would have loved to have kept it, but he said it in such a low voice that I didn’t make out the words.

### *Get Me a Newspaper*

The Elder lived like a hermit in the world and because of this was interested in the whole world. One day I was with him, in a friend’s car. We were driving through a northern suburb of Athens. My friend stopped at a newspaper stand to buy something. Then the Elder called to us through the open car window “Get

say something. Then the Elder called to us through the open car window. "Get me a newspaper, too." We were surprised. We asked, "Which newspaper do you want us to get you?" The Elder replied, "Whatever newspaper". We got him one, and as we gave it to him we asked, "Elder, do you read the papers?" He replied, "No, but well, now that I saw them hanging outside the newspaper stand, I said, let's get one to see what's going on in the world." However, the Elder knew the world a whole lot better than journalists did.

### *I Pray That God Lend a Hand*

One day, when we were talking the Elder asked, "What news have you brought me from the world? How are the politicians doing? How is the economy going?" I told him the main news, in rough terms. The Elder shook his head in sorrow: "We are not doing well. I pray that God lends a hand." In the life to come we will learn what the ceaseless prayers of the Elder for the whole world meant.

### *Let us Preserve the Unity of the Faithful*

He showed particular interest in Church news. He knew that I read a religious newspaper and he often asked me questions. I told him the most important news. He became very sad when he heard about scandals or disputes. He said that we must preserve the unity of all the faithful within the Church because Christ prayed to His Father for this unity. He was concerned at the time when the matter of the church property and autonomy was being discussed, in Greece. He advised a struggle, with both enthusiasm and care, to preserve the divine rights of the Church.

### *Education and Grace*

Regarding the parents of a child that had been led astray, he said, in sadness: "His parents, with so much education, so much psychological knowledge, so much academic learning, lost their child from within their grasp. What can education do for you? Only God's grace, only our true love, that sacrifices itself, secretly, for others, can save others and us."

### *Do Not Judge*

The Elder warned against judging others for their sins, because God would allow us to fall into the same sins. He said to me, "Like that, a housewife in a

village, was lighting her oven in order to bake bread, at that moment she wished that she could skewer and burn alive in the oven a girl in the neighbouring village who had become pregnant by some stranger. A few years later, when her husband was abroad, she also became pregnant by a fellow villager.” He concluded, “That’s why God counsels us not to judge anyone, not even our enemy and to bless everyone, even our enemies.”

### *When We Become Holy*

We went, with a friend, to carry out some jobs for the monastery. We also had the Elder with us in the car. At some point, I noticed that we were driving past the buildings of Millenialists, the Jehovah’s Witnesses. I felt sorrow and agitation overcome me, regarding the soul-destroying work of those heretics. Instead of repenting for their sins, they strive to undermine faith in Christ of souls for whom Christ died and rose again. The Elder was silent. At some point I thought to myself, “What does the Elder think about it all? Doesn’t he get annoyed about these people and their works?” I immediately heard the Elder say, “Oh, those poor false witnesses of Jehovah, may God have mercy on them. Some Christians get angry with them; others quarrel with them and swear at them, others pursue them through the courts.

Yes, Millenialism<sup>[4]</sup> is not opposed like that. Do you know how it is opposed? When we become holy.”

### *Midnight Phone Call*

One of the Elder’s spiritual children, who always helped him, more than willingly, with various jobs at the Monastery, had a weakness that he could not control. He loved good food and good wine. He told me about the following incident: “One evening, I was at a friend’s house, with our families. The table laid on for us had delicious rabbit, other good food, and very good wine.

We ate, we drank, in excess, and when it was late, a little before midnight, we left. We arrived home. I went to bed, but I couldn’t sleep. I turned this way; I turned that way, nothing. My stomach was heavy and my head spinning. I suffered like that for a good few hours and I was upset. At about three in the morning I heard the telephone ring. “Who could it be at such an hour? It’ll be a wrong number,” I thought. I picked up the phone and what do I hear? The Elder’s voice. “Oh, you blessed thing,” he said to me, “haven’t I told you enough times, kid, not to get carried away by good food and wine? Well, now, look what’s happened to you. I see you suffering and I suffer with you. I’m praying that you get over it. You pray too, and next time be more careful.” From then on

that you get over it. You play too, and next time be more careful. From then on, every time I'm invited to dinner I remember that midnight phone call from the Elder and contain myself. I don't want to be a glutton again, and most of all, I don't want to upset the Elder again."

### *The Hour of Death - Second Coming*

One day I asked him in his cell, "Elder, there is a lot of talk nowadays about the 666 and the approaching arrival of the Anti-Christ. Some even say that he has already come. They talk about an electronic mark on the right hand or on the forehead, about the conflict between Christ and the Anti-Christ, and about the Second Coming of the Lord. What do you say about that?" The Elder replied, "What can I say? I don't say that I saw the Mother of God, or that a war is going to take place and other such things. I know that the Anti-Christ will come and that the Lord's Second Coming will take place, but I don't know when. Tomorrow, in a thousand years, I don't know. But I'm not worried about it. Since I know that the hour of our death is, for each one of us, the Second Coming of the Lord. That hour is very close."

### *A Time to Reprove and a Time to Praise*

The Elder did not neglect, when he judged it necessary, to reprove me or to praise me. Indeed, he did it at times when I did not expect it. He reproved me mainly when I was calm and my days were spent comfortably, without clouds. Then he found hidden carelessness or omissions of mine and pointed them out. In contrast, he praised me when I was going through difficult days with sorrows, and he saw for himself that I was being humble and patient. His edification recalls St. Isaac the Syrian who said, "God and his angels are glad when in need, whereas the devil and his servants are with comfort."

### *From Crete by Airplane for the Elder*

One afternoon, a lady from Crete, a high school teacher, was waiting with us outside his brick-built cell. She told us that she had a serious and urgent problem and she came from the island especially by plane. Time was passing; the Elder did not turn up. The teacher, who was constantly looking at her watch, at some point decided, sadly, to leave. She said to us, "I must catch the plane and go back. Tomorrow I've got work and I can't put it off. I'll get leave again, as soon as possible, and I'll come to see the Elder another time. "We were impressed by the teacher's trust in the Elder's guidance. In order to guarantee it she had

disregarded the trouble, distance and expense.

### *My Spiritual Father*

Likewise, the Elder was impressed by the unreserved trust that my spiritual father showed for him. He said, “Many spiritual fathers send their children to me with their problems, but your one sends them to me with a free hand. He accepts anything I say to them, from beforehand, without ever objecting.”

### *The Vineyard Worker*

Regarding a worthy worker of the Lord’s vineyard the Elder said, “I see that he is doing well, he is walking along the correct, Orthodox, road. I hope it will always be like that, without swerving. Because if some one departs from the right road and takes the crooked one it is doubtful whether he will realise it and return. Again, in case he does realize it and turn back it is doubtful whether he will manage to reach the right road that he was walking along again.”

### *Famous people who Visited Him in Secret*

Famous people also visited the Elder from time to time. For various reasons, they wanted to keep their visit a secret. Sometimes even famous people feel the need to bow their heads and listen to a humble and holy ascetic and Elder. Someone who does not praise them, like their mass of obligatory flatterers and who does not judge them like their mass of impassioned rivals. Rather, he understands them. He will tell them the truth with love and will put their troubled and tired souls at ease.

### *They Don’t change*

A friend expressed his discomfort with a very conservative colleague of his who was committed to external forms and educational methods that failed, mainly because they did not have an Orthodox direction. He had not been able to convince him, despite his attempts. The Elder replied, “Don’t be upset, and don’t waste your efforts. Those people don’t change. They’ve learnt the old way.” Following the Elder’s advice, my friend accepted his colleague as he was, without wanting to change him anymore and tried to do his own work as well as he could.



## *Advice for a Mother with Shattered Nerves*

The Elder advised a mother with shattered nerves due to serious trials, to struggle to become holy. At the same time, he gave her practical advice so that she could manage to escape from her melancholy. She should take care to get rid of unpleasant memories and fears; she should remember pleasing events; she should always cultivate optimistic thoughts about the future; she should listen to good music that she likes; go out for walks in the countryside; go with Christian ladies, who were friends of hers, to vespers and vigils, and also to the Divine Liturgy on Sundays; and she should pray with trust in Christ.

## *Change Company*

He advised a young girl, who had made a suicide attempt, to change the company she kept, as a necessity, because it was influencing her in a negative way. Instead, she should keep company with Christian young girls of her choice. She could have pleasant discussions with them, they could go on trips together, visit churches, and attend services there. Indeed, he saw to it so that a fine young woman, who visited him regularly, could take the first step in making contact.

## *It is Better to Fail as a Lay Person*

A young man told him that he was thinking about going to a monastery. The Elder “saw” that monastic life did not suit him and he advised him to struggle in the world as a Christian. He then said that he was scared of failure. The Elder replied, “It is better to fail as a lay person, rather than as a monk.”

## *A Prejudiced Man is Not Helped*

Someone with a direct need of spiritual help thought about visiting the Elder. However, some friends of his who were prejudiced against the Elder managed to give him negative information, which was naturally false. Following this, he rejected all thought of visiting the Elder. One of the Elder’s spiritual children told him about the man being tried. He was well-known to him and he was saddened by his prejudice. The Elder “saw” the most serious and dangerous problems of that man and advised his spiritual child to convince the man to visit him. But he was not convinced. The poison of his prejudice was potent.

Then the Elder, out of pity for him, called him by phone personally, something he was not in the habit of doing, and he invited him. The man replied

that he was thankful for his phone call but he could not accept the invitation. The Elder called him up three times, and he refused to visit him, all three times, using various excuses not to visit. This person who had direct need of the Elder's help eventually remained without help, due to his stubborn prejudice. This was like a tragic irony, given that the Elder said, "If he came to see me not more than five minutes would be needed to change him. I would have told him some secret of his, I would have won his confidence easily and I would help him solve his problem." However, the man permanently kept to his rejection. The human soul is a mystery. Did the Elder know that he would not visit him in the end? Probably, yes. Then why did he insist on inviting him? Perhaps, so that he could not complain to God that the Elder did not want to help him. Perhaps, so that when he realizes his mistake he only turns against himself in order to become humble, repent and apologise to the Elder, who now receives visits in his heavenly cell.

### *Smoking and the Candidate for Priesthood*

A candidate for priesthood visited him and discussed various personal matters with him. When he had finished and he bent over to kiss his hand the strong stench of nicotine came from his mouth. Then the Elder said to him, "How are you going to become a priest of God, you blessed thing, when you haven't even got the will to quit smoking?"

"Elder," he replied, "you are right. It is my passion. I smoke more than two packets of cigarettes a day. I'm ashamed to tell you this now. Even my wife is angry about it." The Elder gave him instructions on how to stop smoking. He followed them, and managed, with God's help, to stop. The first person to celebrate was his wife. He was soon ordained.

### *Water Saved You*

An acquaintance of mine suffered from kidney stones and colic. He found relief by drinking plenty of water. The Elder said to him, "The water saved you. Don't stop drinking it."

### *Eagerness and Blessing*

One of his spiritual children offered to show him a new type of water based paint for the Monastery. The Elder agreed. So, one day he brought his equipment and the colours with him and went to the monastery. When he arrived, the Elder was sleeping. He was impatient. He also, perhaps, wanted to surprise the Elder

was sleeping. He was impatient too, maybe, wanted to surprise me there pleasantly. So, he went and painted over a small area of wall, as an example. As soon as the Elder woke up, he set off for the main building from his brick cell. When he arrived and saw the painted part of the wall he did not show any enthusiasm. His spiritual child asked, "Elder, perhaps I shouldn't have painted it without your blessing?" The Elder replied, "Of course you shouldn't have. You could at least have waited until I woke up." Following that the spiritual child realised that work that is done, even with overwhelming eagerness, but without a specific blessing from the Elder, is not beneficial.

### *To God's Ears First*

Once, the Elder was walking in the forest where he met a bishop. When the bishop learnt that he was a monk he complained that monks leave the social aspect of the Christian effort to them, take flight to the mountains looking only to save their own soul. The Elder listened to him with a bowed head and when he stopped he said, "Master, when you speak the words leave your mouth and go to the ears of men. When monks speak their words go to God's ears first and then they reach men's ears." The Elder's words recall another Athonite monk's phrase, "The question is not for a monk to be close to us, but close to God; because the closer he gets to God, the closer he is to us."

### *Unexpected Phone Calls*

The Elder knew that many people would feel great joy if they could talk to him by phone. Especially when the initiative for such telephone communication came from the Elder himself. Then, the other person was not worried about whether he was disturbing him or not. Those hallowed phone calls from the Elder were few, because all his time was taken up facing the problems caused by his sicknesses, the running of the Monastery, his many visitors and the continual phone calls that he received. In order for him to take the step of calling someone, he had to "see" a great and urgent need. Then he put his manifold duties aside and rushed to help the person suffering. He once said to me, "I really would like us to talk over the phone, but you can see what happens Visitors come, my phone's always ringing, we've got the Monastery buildings and on top of that, I've got illness and old age. How can I manage?" And yet, the Elder managed everything with his secret telephone: His unceasing prayer to God Almighty.

### *Besiege Him with Your Prayers*

The parents of a young man visited the Elder in great concern. Their son had made a suicide attempt for reasons unknown to them. The Elder said to them, “Your child is sensitive, he withered from jealousy and little by little he became a stranger to you. He nearly committed suicide after being rejected by a girl. It needs care, in case the sorrow returns. Very few words and plenty of prayer are needed for the boy to be healed from his wound. Not advice, criticism, and so on. A few careful words, that will strengthen his hope and prayer straightaway. Besiege him with your prayers.” Events justified the Elder’s words.

### *You Loved Them and You Put Pressure on Them*

He told other parents who had grave problems with their children: “Do you see what happened to you with your children? You loved them, but you also put pressure on them, without having the necessary holiness to keep them close to Christ. As long as they were young, you kept them, when they grew up you lost them. You should not fight against your children, but against Satan who fights your children. You should say only a few words to them and pray a lot.”

Again, the Elder’s words were a photograph of reality.

### *Stop Smoking at Once*

He told a smoker: “Cigarettes do not do any good anywhere. On the contrary, they bring about cancer and other illnesses. Stop smoking at once.”

### *You’re Influenced by Whatever You Have Contact With*

Once I mentioned a saying of St. John Chrysostom to the Elder, “The strong desire for virtue leads to the fulfilment of the desire.” As soon as he heard it his face lit up with joy and he said to me, “That’s significant. I say the same thing to people. You’re influenced by whatever you have contact with. A bad book harms you. A good book benefits you. Even when you are not ready to put it into practice, because you desire it within, little by little, in time, without force or pressure, the desire for good matures and finally you put it into practice.”

### *Children Do Not Need Pressure*

A mother asked if it was better to take her children with her and settle in London. The Elder said, “Don’t buy a house in London, don’t go there. Your work is not there. The climate is damp, the people foreigners, and cold, of another faith. Your children will be sad there. It is better for you to stay here

another family. Your children will be sad there. It is better for you to stay here where the people are Christian Orthodox, Greeks. The climate is good here and the children will be happy. Children do not need pressure. When they are naughty, do what is right, as their mother, but don't put pressure on them. It is good that you read the Bible to them every day. If one of your children protests, leave him, take your other children, go into another room and continue reading. When you go to Church and your children don't want to come with you, don't force them. But don't be indifferent about it. You should say to them, "Children, I'm leaving for Church. Whoever wants to come can come with me now or come later. "Say those words to them, and pray for your children a great deal. God will speak to them by your prayer."

### *The Most Suitable Answer Each Time*

The Elder wanted to bolster the enthusiasm one of his spiritual children had the Christian struggle. The Elder felt his forehead and said to him, "You see, the saints, like you had arches over their eyebrows."

The Elder's pastoral care was personalised. He often gave different answers on the same matter to different people.

Sometimes he answered my questions saying: "Do whatever God enlightens you to do." That was an answer.

Just that it demanded a great deal of prayer, as in, "Speak, Lord, your servant listens." At other times he said to me, "I don't have anything to tell you." That again was an answer. Just that it needed plenty of humility, for me to accept it without bitterness. I once asked him, "Elder, does God also talk to us through events? He replied, "Of course, God often uses that method, talking to us through events." Our problem is decoding the messages correctly.

### *Governed By Wilful Determination*

The Elder was asked about a certain Christian, who had entrapped himself in his passions due to a trial he was going through. The Elder said, "I see that he is clever, and he has good within him. However, with that trial he's going through, he's lost his patience, he's become irritated and allowed his bad self to strangle his good self. He has allowed his ego, wilful determination and Satan to govern him." The Elder's revelation about this man, who faced his trial with impatience and egotism, shows us how important patience and humility are in times of trial, that purify us of our passions.

<sup>[1]</sup> Omonia Square is in central Athens. It is a very cosmopolitan place. Several main streets meet there, and

it is noted for its traffic, pollution, and, perhaps, a little shady, street-life.[*Translator*].

[2] A journey of -2 hours. [*Translator*].

[3] In Greece it is not only expected that young people give up their seat to an older person, but even more so to a priest, when using public transport. [*Translator*].

[4] i.e. The Watchtower Society and Jehovah's Witnesses who are known in Greece as Chiliasts or Millennialists. This is from the Greek and Latin words respectively for a "thousand". It was the original name of this relatively modern sect before it was changed in 1931. It comes from their erroneous belief in a thousand year reign of Christ on earth, based on a misinterpretation of the Book of Revelation. This sect also adheres to many other heretical beliefs, long condemned by the Orthodox Catholic Church, including denying the divinity of Christ, just like the Arian heresy of old. In other areas they operate like any other cult group using their own peculiar translation of the Bible, having no real acts of worship, no priesthood and a strict command line run by an small group in the Watchtower Organisation. For further information see the web-site of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America <http://www.goarch.org> or contact your local Diocese and find out what publications are available regarding sects and cults. We feel that it would not be against the teaching of Elder Porphyrios who tells us to become holy, to also follow the practical advice given in Fr. George Papademetriou's paper *Cults in America*, (publ. Holy Cross Orthodox Press) "If you are lonely or in trouble, always talk to your family or to your priest. Learn to pray in your Orthodox way, be strong in your faith, and place all your trust in Jesus Christ our Lord." [*Translator*].

## 11. HUMILITY

### *Sick Humility and the Psychiatrist*

One day the Elder said to me, “A Christian should avoid sick religiosity: Both the feeling of superiority due to his virtues and the feeling of inferiority due to his sinfulness. A complex is one thing, humility quite another, depression is one thing, repentance another. A secular psychiatrist visited me once and criticised Christianity, because, he said, it creates guilt and depression. I answered: “I accept that some Christians, due to their own mistakes, or those of others, are trapped in the sickness of guilt. But you must also accept that secular people are trapped in a worse sickness, called pride. Whereas religious guilt of those close to Christ leaves through repentance and confession, the pride of secular people, who live apart from Christ, does not leave.”

These positions of the Elder cleared up various questions I had within myself, regarding the psychological problems of the Christian life. I realised that the Elder wanted us to avoid pride, dressing ourselves up in self-justifying “Christian” Phariseism of virtue or self-condemning “Christian” terrified consciousness of sin. I saw that the audacity of those who considered themselves “pure” and the timidity of those who considered themselves “guilty” did not differ, in essence. They are two sides of the same coin, pride. A truly faithful Christian is freed from guilt by confession and remission of sins, and enjoys this freedom that Christ has granted him. Knowing that this is a gift from God he is grateful and is not proud. He is pure through God’s blood and not through his own achievements. Thus, he is glad, gives thanks and is not proud. In addition, he sees all others as being potentially good through Christ’s blood.

The Elder showed us the road that avoided evil (sin) and worse (pride of one’s virtues), and led us to the best one, to the humility of virtue. For that reason, he tried to protect the genuineness of humility from the danger of being distorted. He said to me. “We should be humble. but we should not speak in a self-effacing

manner. There is a difference between being truly humble, and being humble only in speech. The latter is a trap set by the devil. It brings despair and inactivity, whereas true humility brings hope and the working of Christ's commandments."

The Elder, with his teaching and more so with his life, tended his flock and led them to pastures of love and humility. He himself was humble, believing that he himself was nothing, because God is, as he said, Everything, and he believed that whatever he had, which we saw, was not his, but a gift from God.

### *What A Good God We Have*

One day, when I was in his cell talking with him, I heard the phone ringing continually. The Elder did not pick up the receiver. At some point, however, he said to me, "Please, if you would, pick it up and ask who it is and what they want." It was a lady from some city in Northern Greece and said that it was necessary to speak with the Elder. He replied, "Tell her that I can't right now. I have a lot of people waiting for me. It's better to call in the evening." I passed it on. The lady asked me to tell the Elder that she appeals to him to pray about a serious family problem. When the Elder heard that he told me to tell her that he is praying. She repeated the urgency of the problem.

Then the Elder said to me, "Give me the telephone." Opening up the speaker, so that I could hear the conversation, he said to her, "Well, you blessed thing, why are you so impatient, I told you that I'm praying, do you think I need to hear you to learn about your problem? Isn't it such and such? But the problem is not only with you, it is with your husband, who has so and so happening to him. But also with your first child and your second one, where such and such is happening. Isn't it like that, just like I'm telling you?" The lady was amazed and replied, "It's exactly like that. Just like you are telling me, Elder." Then the Elder said, "Well, since it is like that pray, do what Christ tell us to do, and I'll pray too. Don't be anxious, your problems will turn out alright." The lady could not find words to thank him.

The Elder gave her some more advice, blessed her, put the phone down and turned to me. I was staring at him, dumbfounded. "Did you hear that? What sort of miracle was that? What a great and good God we have! I'm here, she is a stranger, faraway, and God clearly showed me, the sinner, her problems, those of her husband and of her children. What a great God we have!"

I passed from one sense of wonder to another: About his astonishing perceptiveness and his even more astonishing humility. I could not discern even the slightest trace of self-satisfaction, conceit or arrogance regarding his



clairvoyance. On the contrary, I saw his wonder for God, to Whom he attributed all the glory of the achievement with humbleness. He put himself aside and from there wondered, together with me, at God's work. He functioned like a simple instrument of God, to Whom he offered his tongue and his ears (that belonged to God) so that He could be heard and could speak. The Elder was an insignificant mediator, just like I was a mediator at that moment over the phone, when I passed on questions and answers between the Elder and the lady. It would have been completely ridiculous to boast that I had done something. Perhaps, the Elder asked me to pass the messages on to the lady, in the beginning, so that I could understand this great truth. This, with the huge difference that I passed on a message from one human being to another, on earth, whereas the Elder passed in messages from God to a human being, between heaven and earth. He did not let me hear the conversation in order to satisfy my curiosity; he let me hear it to strengthen my faith in what a "great and good God we have!" None of the Elder's actions were by chance. On the contrary, every action of his was directed by God and carried many meanings.

### *Rejecting Praise, Accepting Criticism*

The Elder did not pretend to be humble, he was humble. He did not put on an outward display of humility, since he was deeply aware of man's insignificance compared with God's magnificence. Once a high school principal, who was a theologian, visited him with a periodical in his hand. He opened it up full of joy and said, "Elder, listen to what the magazine says." Then he started to read him an article that sung the praises of the Holy Fathers and spoke about living saints. It also mentioned that all one had to do in order to be convinced was to visit a new monastery by Milessi, Oropos. It mentioned everything except the name of Fr. Porphyrios. As soon as the Elder heard him, he interrupted him angrily. "What, man, is all that it says? Who told him to write such things? If you are going to come and read such things to me don't ever come again!" Following this cold shower, the principal did not dare speak to him about praise again.

Secular people and lukewarm Christians shine with joy and enthusiasm when you praise them. Even when they realise that, the praises are mere flattery. They scowl in bitterness and annoyance when you reprove them, even when they see that the reproof reveals some truths. The exact opposite occurred with Fr. Porphyrios. He was sad and he objected when he was praised; even if he realized that, the praises were justified, in the consciousness of those praising him, at least. He was glad and thankful when reproofed, even if he was aware that the reproofs were unjustified.

Knowing this spiritual stance of the Elder's and reacting to his admonition, "Don't write it down, kid, don't talk about it." One day I said to him, in a somewhat crude manner: "Elder, don't think that when I talk to friends about you that I am praising you personally. Do you want to know, how I see you, what I feel about you fundamentally, in reality?"

"Yes, go on, I'm listening," the Elder replied, with great interest. "I see you like an ordinary person, like most of us. Not only that, but I see you as a weak person, and if God's grace was to leave you, even for a short while, you are capable of committing the gravest of sins. Whatever good you do now is not yours but God's, because you do it with God's enlightenment and strength and not with your own. Please forgive me for mentioning it like this." The Elder was enthusiastic and said to me, "Yes, you blessed thing, you've found it. That's the truth. That's the way things are, just as you described them." I was embarrassed, because I spoke so unsightly. At the same time, I was satisfied because I saw him shining with the joy of humility. I really was envious of him at that moment. If only I could feel just a tiny bit of that rare and priceless joy.

Some time later I heard disparaging comments about the Elder from some "intellectual" circles and I was embittered. On a visit to the Elder, on impulse, I started to tell him about it, but I regretted it immediately and stopped. The Elder took a lively interest and said, "Continue, continue, tell me what they are saying about me. I want to learn. Not out of curiosity, I want to see where I'm going wrong so that I can correct myself." I realised, from his words, that it was not a case of being personally offended. That is to say, it was not a matter of pride. It was merely a matter of humble highlighting possible mistakes of his, in order to correct them, for the benefit of others, to the glory of God. For this reason, the disparaging remarks about him were welcomed. Regarding the detractors themselves, the Elder's answer was an open embrace. He said in relation to this, "You know different people came to me, both from "Zoe" and from "Soter" and from "Stavros" and other Christian Organisations<sup>[1]</sup>, but also secular people, and indifferent people and atheists. I don't, make distinctions between them. I look upon all of them in the same way and I love them all just the same." The Elder opposed his detractors not with personal debates, but with humble Christian love.

### *The Rug and the Bugs*

One day I found the Elder lying upon his bed. On top of the blankets covering him, he had an old rug, full of holes. I was struck by it. The Elder realized that without telling me anything about it. He said to me, "You're looking at this old rug and asking why I use it over me? Well, I love this rug a lot. It has

rug and asking why I've thrown it over me? well, I love this rug a lot. It has quite a history. My Elder's grandmother gave it to him, from her dowry. The Elder gave it to me, as a blessing, when I was his young disciple. I have not been separated from it since. When I was on the Holy Mountain I laid it out over the earth floor in my cell and laid down and slept on it. However, since it was cold at night, scorpions used to come and hide under the rug, because they found warmth underneath my body. When I woke up in the morning, I picked up the rug carefully. I took a broom, and gently removed the scorpions from my cell, without harming them. The next evening the scorpions would come back to keep warm again."

I was amazed and shuddered at the episode, imagining the Elder blissfully sleeping on scorpions: I contained my horror supposing that perhaps the scorpions were small and harmless. The Elder soon got up from his bed, and suggested that I accompany him for a walk amongst the trees outside. Surprisingly, there were no visitors there at the time and so I had the rare privilege of being in the exclusive company of the Elder. As we were walking along silently, I searched my thoughts to find the most urgent matter I had for discussion. However, the Elder interrupted my thoughts by saying, "And don't think that those scorpions I told you about were tiny. They were proper ones, large." I did not know what to be most amazed at: The extent of the Elder's spiritual perception, that "caught" my most hidden thoughts, or the extent of the scorpions? At that moment I remembered a relevant phrase from the Gospel and I said, "Elder, Christ's words were fulfilled by you: "Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you" (Luke 10:19)." The Elder reacted in anger, "No, kid, don't say such things. Christ said that about His seventy apostles, he didn't say it about me." Then, instead of his spiritual perception, or the scorpions, I was even more amazed by the extent of his humility.

### *Humility and Grace*

I was talking to the Elder about a friend, who had the shortcoming of excessive pride, due to which many problems had been created. "Elder," I said, "if God's grace comes can't my friend change?" The Elder answered, "If God's grace comes everybody and everything changes, but then, in order for it to come, humility is needed first?" That is, a person has to do what little he can first and then grace will complete the work.

## *What Do You Say?*

Quite often, the Elder told me about things he had done or advice he had given, and in the end he would say, “What do you say? Did I do the right thing? Did I speak properly? Yes or no?” I felt uneasy. It was impossible for me to say no. I saw that his actions were characterised by divine enlightenment, and square reasoning. Should I say yes? But that would be like the audacity of an infant who tells a wise professor that he agrees with his teaching. Should I not answer at all? Perhaps, though, that would be the disobedience of someone who only takes on the form of humility, in front of someone who is truly humble. I opted to answer, yes, adding that I considered myself incompetent to appraise his actions. However, the Elder really did want my opinion. Evidently, not because I had especially good judgement, but because he had a especially developed sense of humility. Besides, as I was informed, he asked many others the same question, of whether he did the right thing. He put that question not so that he would create the impression of humility, but because he really was humble and felt the need to compare his opinion with a second one. He saw himself as equal with others, and most times as beneath them, because he felt his sinfulness before God most profoundly. When he said, “I, Porphyrios, the sinner, also humbly pray to God” he meant it, and lived it, it was not just humble words.

## *Hidden Benefit*

I had been informed about a serious leg injury that a friend’s nephew had suffered in a car accident. Some years later I came across the uncle and nephew together in a church forecourt, and the obligatory introductions were made. When the nephew moved away, I asked the uncle, “Is that your nephew who was in serious danger of having his broken leg cut off, due to gangrene, as you once told me? I see that he’s healthy.” Then the uncle revealed the following, “If we hadn’t had the prayers of Fr. Porphyrios then, on the day of the operation, when the surgeon’s hands were miraculously led, you would see him in a wheelchair today. The doctor himself confesses this.” This incident made me ask one more time, “How many people, I wonder, who have benefited from the Elder’s divine gifts circulate amongst us, without us knowing it because he said, “see that you say nothing to anyone” (Mark 1:44). How many good works of his were shrouded in silence, because the Elder did not want those who benefited to “publicise” their benefactor? Only God and the humble love of the Elder know.

## *Photographs and Tape-Recorders*

The Elder detested photographs and tape-recorders. Not, of course, as technological achievements, but as means that threatened to turn him into a public spectacle and hearing. On a visit of mine I said, "A spiritual child of yours has given me a photograph of you." He reacted immediately, "Don't, kid, photographs! It's not good for them to be passed around. Once I was doing a baptism, and they took photos without asking me. There I'm seen in my vestments with this woman, with bare arms standing next to me. Why do they do that? It's not right." I assured him that it was a good photo because it showed him walking along the road, and that I would keep it at home for myself. The Elder did not speak. I took his silence to be a silent agreement.

On another occasion, we talked about his tape-recorder. He used it, from time to time, to listen to Byzantine music. It had broken down and I had to go and get it fixed. He said, "The tape-recorder is a good thing, when we hear good things using it. One day a lady phoned me and told me about her problems, and I answered her. Without telling me anything, she recorded the conversation on a cassette. Other ladies in her neighbourhood copied the cassette and now they listen to it and gossip. Oh dear, what's become of me." It was something unexpected, which saddened the Elder a great deal. It seems that God did not allow the Elder, for reasons known to Him, to "see" what was happening in time. Of course, the obvious reason for the Elder's displeasure in both cases was in order to avoid scandal. There was also the wider, unseen, reason of his sense of humility. The Elder, like a genuine Orthodox recluse, despite living in the world, loved the hidden life and was troubled by his promotion and publicity, whether by audio-visual or any other means.

### *Complete Obedience*

When he was a young monk on the Holy Mountain he asked his Elder's blessing to become the disciple of another, very strict Elder, for a period of time, so that he could practice the asceticism of humility and obedience more. When he went into that Elder's cell, he saw him saying sternly, "Go back to where you came from," and pointed at the window. Without being disturbed, or answering back, Fr. Porphyrios headed straight for the window and left through it.

### *You, who acts the Saint*

It was his name day. A friend was in his cell, while he was receiving a call with good wishes from a priest known to him. The Elder said, "What can I do, sinner that I am? These visitors will get me into trouble. Some call me a prophet,

others a saint, and other things like that. Oh dear, what's become of me! Some day God will take me up to heaven and say: Hey you, come over here, you who acts the saint and they think you are like St. Nectarios and the other saints. What will my defence be then, wretch that I am." Personalising the words of an Athonite father I could say, "Fr. Porphyrios was a saint, because, out of his great humility, he honestly believed that he wasn't one."

### *Humility and Obedience*

I once asked him: "Elder, what's the difference between obedience and Christian humility?" He answered with a smile: "It's the same thing". Truly, when we do not obey God's will, via our spiritual father, can we seriously believe that we are humble? Can we kill off the monster of pride that nestles within us with any other weapon apart from obedience to God's will? Christ offers us the measure of obedience, as the sinless God-Man, Who "being found in human form humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross"

### *Childhood Temptations*

The Elder revealed his humility by being obedient to God's will even from when he was a small child. Tending the herd outside his village, and reading the Life of St. John the Hut-dweller word by word, he came to love the saints, but most of all Christ. He showed his love as Christ defined it, "If you love me, keep My commandments" (Jn. 14:15). For the love of Christ, despite being a weak little child, he did not hesitate to sacrifice every form of natural love. At the beginning of our acquaintance he said to me, "You know, when I went to the Holy Mountain I was a thirteen year old child. I did not have temptations, like those, who were older than me and who remembered old sweethearts and the like. I had another temptation. Because I loved my parents a great deal, the devil made them appear before me, quite alive, in my imagination, and I cried, I cried inconsolably. But when they made me a monk, the temptation left." Christ says, "he who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me" (Matt. 10:37).

### *I Pray Humbly*

One day, while sick in bed he said, "I love all of you, I, the sinner, pray to God humbly for all of you. Please, pray for me too." He told me that he prayed humbly but he never said that he was humble. On the contrary, he often said that

humbly, but he never said that he was humble. On the contrary, he often said that he was a sinner, and indeed, “the greatest sinner in the world.”

### *Humble Chanting*

He once told me about the significance of Byzantine music within Orthodox worship. He told me about chanters on Mount Athos who chanted simply, devoutly, humbly, with the aim of helping the praying monks. He added, “There are some good chanters here in the world too, but, well, here... how can I put it... they often chant with their ego.” The Elder loved Byzantine psalmody from the holy services, which had humility and therefore created a climate of devotion and holiness.

### *His Carved Wooden Cross*

Once, while we were conversing in a devout manner, he took out a wooden cross from under his pillow. He gave it to me to kiss and said, “Now then, look at this cross. Do you like it?” I held it in my hands and I looked at it. It was a real work of art. It had the Crucifixion carved on one side, with very fine and meticulous skill. On the other, it had the Virgin with Child. I expressed my honest admiration of it and I gave it back to him. The Elder was very pleased and hid it under his headrest again. He said, “You know, I love that cross a lot.” Much later one of the Elder’s spiritual children told me that the Elder had carved that cross himself. Then I was even more amazed. The Elder had hidden the fact that it was the work of his own hands from me, with his known humility. He only asked if I could find him some pieces of boxwood coming from his own part of the country. He did not tell me why he wanted it.

### *The Dentist and the Elder’s Teeth*

Quite a few months after his repose I met a dentist at a religious talk. I learnt that he knew the Elder. To my great joy not only did I meet him, but I also learnt that he had treated the Elder and extracted some of his teeth. I was especially moved by the last piece of information and I asked him if he had kept the teeth, which he had taken out. The dentist replied, “I have not kept one of them. The Elder didn’t let me. He asked for them and took them away with him.” His humility had even reached this point. He “saw” what would happen if people found out that an Athenian dentist had teeth belonging to Fr. Porphyrios. The Elder was humble, because, overall, he spurned pride and ambition. Even in the form of posthumous fame.

## *Humble Account of Divine Gifts*

One day, the Elder talked about his gift of foresight almost openly. Knowing how rare such disclosures were, I looked at him in surprise, with a secret concern about the danger of pride. He “caught” my concern immediately and said to me: “You know, one person can talk about his sins and be proud and another person can talk about his virtues and be humble.” I liked that profound and discerning turn of phrase very much. It revealed to me that pride and humility really are inner conditions that are not dependent on external forms and appearances, which can often be deceptive. I reflected that the Elder had shown this truth to me because he had evidently acquired discernment and dispassion, which are virtues of the perfect.

Therefore, he believed that not one of our virtues belonged to us, but were God’s. The only thing that is ours, is our sin. A proud person possesses his pride, which even makes him talk about his sins, either being ostensibly humble or by boasting. A humble person considers his humility to be a gift from God and so can talk comfortably about the virtues that the person who has Christ living within him has. The humble person feels that he is not exalting himself, but Christ.

<sup>[1]</sup> He is referring to various fraternities of theologians that exist in Greece. [*Translator*].



## 12. DISCRETION

Having acquired true discernment, the Elder was able to act with much discretion in each and every situation. He did not insult or hurt anybody. Even when he had to undertake spiritual surgery, in order to remove some abscess on the soul, he tried to do it as painlessly as possible.

### *Reprimanded for Giving Indiscreet Information*

One day, when asked by some people, out of overzealous and indiscreet enthusiasm, I gave certain inside information about the Monastery. This was the sort of information that only the Elder should have given, with his keen discernment. When I went into his cell and mentioned the incident, without realizing my mistake, the Elder was sorry. Then I understood and asked, “Was what I did a mistake, Elder?” He answered, somewhat abruptly, “Of course it was a mistake. What were you doing, you blessed thing, giving out that information? Were you qualified or obliged to answer? When they asked you should have said, “Ask the Elder, he’ll give you an answer”. “I became very upset upon hearing those words, mainly because I had upset the Elder. He realised this immediately, and tried to comfort me, to free me from my sorrow. In the end he said, “Come now, bend over so that I can read you the forgiveness prayer.” When he had finished, he added tenderly, “Now then, go with God’s blessing. That was it. It’s all over. It’s gone. All responsibility has left you.” But I was still very touchy about it. When I arrived home, I was still upset. I reflected that it was not enough for me to have good intentions, I had to make a great and serious effort to acquire discretion. Then I bitterly remembered the saying: “The road to hell is paved with good intentions.” The Elder “picked up” on my sorrow, from a distance, and told two pilgrims to call me as soon as they got back to Athens. He wanted them to ask my forgiveness, on his behalf, because he had upset me. They asked for me over the phone, but I wasn’t at home when they called. The next time I arrived at the monastery a nun told me

that the Elder had been looking for me in order to say sorry. I was amazed by his tact. His humility and the sensitivity of his love crushed me.

When it was my turn to enter his cell, I made a strong protest. I complained because he lowered himself so much, as though he were someone insignificant, yet he raised me up so high, as though I was some significant person. Whereas, in fact, the opposite was true. I implored him without hesitation to expose whatever faults I had, and to reprimand me, if he considered it necessary. I would be grateful to him, because this would help me gain knowledge of myself and help me be purified of the passions. The Elder smiled affably. He calmed me down saying, “Fine, fine, forget about it. Come now, tell me, what did you come to talk about?” We continued, talking about other matters.

### *Don't Remind Others Of Their Mistakes*

I wanted his opinion about something that I had apprehended. When I got the chance, I said: “Elder, observation of various incidents in my life have made me come to the following conclusion and I try to put into practice as much as I can. When someone disagrees with me, and I am convinced of the correctness of my viewpoint I say to him, “Let's stop quarrelling and leave it to God, so that He can give us the right answer through events that follow.” When events justify my argument I don't remind the person that I was quarrelling with about the conversation we once had, and how I was later justified. I remain silent. Usually the other person is also silent. We rarely find the courage to admit our mistakes. Yet, it is sufficient that the other person realises this internally. I am glad, because, through my silence, I let the other person feel comfortable with me. He realizes that I respect him and I am not belittling him. “When the Elder heard that he became enthusiastic and said, “Kid, you're a psychologist. That's right! You shouldn't accuse the other person because of his mistakes and you shouldn't remind him of them. Then his own conscience puts him in the dock and condemns him. That's the only way that the badness can be corrected. Otherwise, when you criticise him, he defends himself, justifies himself, and casts the blame onto you and others. He becomes thick-skinned and callous. Instead of being corrected, he becomes worse.”

### *I Needed Funds, but I Didn't Ask for Anything*

It was around the time when the work had begun to lay the Monastery foundations. I was talking with the Elder and he said to me, “God will send us funds so that the work will continue, even with difficulties. You see, there's also

the problem of me being embarrassed to ask for funds for the monastery. A few months ago, a very rich widow came to see me. She told me about her troubles and, when she had finished, she asked me what she could do for her husband's soul. I was in great need of funds in order to build the Monastery, but I didn't tell her a thing. The only thing I said was for her to give charity wherever she saw fit. The lady left. Later an admirer fell along beside her. He seduced her and used up all her money, with trips abroad and other expenses, supposedly for his financial affairs. Well, to cut a long story short, her money disappeared. The cunning fellow used it all up" (He said the last few words stroking his beard characteristically). The Elder always prayed that people would offer funds from what they had for good works. However, he wanted those donations to be voluntary, unprompted, and certainly not from coercion.

### *Turn Towards the Window*

Due to his sicknesses, the Elder perspired from time to time. This meant that he had to change his undershirt straightaway. When that happened, while we were talking, he would say, "Turn towards the window so that I can change my undershirt." It was a delightful scene. I got up from my seat and went towards the window. I looked out at the trees outside, while the Elder changed his undershirt. At some point he called me, "Come, now let's continue our conversation." I was impressed by his discernment. He did not want me to see him changing his undershirt, thus keeping the required spiritual quality for our interaction. However, he did not want me to leave his cell, as though I was a stranger, despite the fact that he had known me for years. In this way, he created a relaxed psychological climate for me. I would call it one of respectful familiarity.

### *Stop Suggesting That He Come*

Once, I discovered that someone I knew quite well was related to Fr. Porphyrios. As soon as I learnt this I expressed my gladness to my acquaintance and suggested that we visit the Elder together. He vaguely remembered the Elder from the village. He didn't answer my suggestion, either for, (in action) or against, (in words). He was always putting our visit off. Apparently, he was afraid of ironic comments on the part of his friends, given that he was completely secular, had nothing to do with the Church and was unfavourably biased towards all the clergy. When I mentioned him to the Elder, he was pleased that I knew a relative of his. He remembered him quite well, but he said to me, "Don't suggest that he come to see me. Don't remind him about it."

to me, "Don't re-suggest that he come to see me. Don't remind him about it. Don't put pressure on him. Leave him in complete freedom, and unaffected. If he wants he can come on his own. That's the way it should be. We should respect the another person's freedom. Anyway, I love him, and pray for him."

Years later, I learnt that he had visited the Elder one night, in secret, without, of course, saying anything. Therefore, I did not say anything myself and I gave him the impression of ignorance about the visit. The Elder had open visitors, but he also had hidden visitors, "Nicodemuses". He accepted and respected all equally.

### *Discreet Suggestion*

At one time, I would visit the monastery with a friend who had a car. First of all, however, we would go shopping in the fruit and vegetable market and the supermarket. We would fill a few grocery bags with food and take them to the monastery. However, it happened that the monastery had some of one sort of food already, but lacked another. In this way, we created a problem, without realising it. The nuns mentioned this to the Elder and he found the solution. One day a sister said to us, with great tact, "We really are sorry, but because we have this problem with the food it would be better if you offered, if you want, the value of the goods as money for the monastery's needs. Then, we can buy the food we actually need with that money. In that way the monastery will be better served and you won't get tired out carrying bags full of groceries. The Elder knows about the suggestion and has given his blessing." It really was discreet handling of a delicate matter on the part of the Elder. It did not bother us at all; on the contrary, it cheered us up.

### *You Helped the Boy with Your Silence*

I had doubts about whether I had taken the correct stance in a certain incident, and I mentioned it to him. "Elder, one Sunday morning, after the Divine Liturgy, I was invited to the house of a spiritual brother. They had placed a barbecue in the garden and were cooking meat. At some point, I also offered to help. While I was arranging the charcoal, their son, a high-school student, who was watering the flowers, turned the pipe onto the fire. I don't know why he did it. By mistake, playfully, or to show his rebellious streak? I don't know. Anyway, ashes and water spilt onto my clothes. Recovering from my initial surprise, I decided not to add to the incident. I cleaned up my clothes as best as I could, without talking. Then, as though nothing had happened, I started to fix up the barbecue again while the parents reprimanded their son. I don't know if I did the

subside again, while the parents reprimanded them both. I don't know if I did the right thing, if I should have told the boy off too." The Elder replied, "You acted quite properly. When our brother makes a mistake, we should take up the burden of his temptation. True Love inspires us to make sacrifices for the sake of our neighbour. Just like Christ on the Cross calling upon His Heavenly Father to forgive those who crucified him, because they did not know what they were doing. Without sacrifice, that is, by condemnation, we push our brother who sinned even further down. Whereas, with the silent sacrifice of love and our secret prayer for him, we awaken his conscience. It then gets up and accuses him, and so he repents and corrects himself. You helped the boy with your silence". Once again, I stood in amazement at the discretion of the Elder's love.

### *Brotherly Discernment*

I arrived at Kallisia one summer afternoon, with a friend. We found the Elder getting himself ready for a journey. He said, "One of my spiritual children is being ordained a deacon in the provinces. I want to go, but I'm not in such good health. Yet, I ought to go." He set off, with us both accompanying him. We walked until the start of the pine-forest and there we sat on a large rock, because he felt faint, as he told us. We then suggested that he return to the monastery. At that moment, we caught sight of his sister, the abbess, on the road, in the distance. She was with the donkey, loaded with greens for the goats. When she reached us, she greeted us. Then she turned to the Elder and asked, "Where are you going?" He replied, "To an ordination, but I'm not well. I feel faint. What should I do?" The Abbess thought for a moment and said, "Do whatever God enlightens you to do," and carried on her way, peacefully. The Elder was silent for a moment. Then, he got up and said, "I'll go." Then we set off. At first, the Elder's step was unsteady, so much so that we were concerned. However, little by little, we saw that he was becoming steadier, so much so that at the end of walk we did not recognise him. He walked vigorously, like a teenager and we followed him, hastening our pace to keep up with him. Until, we arrived at my friend's car.

We were impressed by the discretion of the Abbess. She respected her brother's freedom, without the familiar spirit of protection for siblings, without unnecessary words. She left him, untroubled, to make his own decision about the trip, according to his enlightenment from God. Also, the Elder himself did not dramatise his problem, but calmly, humbly, discreetly, with secret prayer, decided to continue. The events that followed justified him.

## *Buying Fish*

We had been to see the Elder, with a doctor friend who had just returned from abroad. Indeed, the doctor had left an envelope with small amount of money in it, for the needs of the monastery. We went out for a walk amongst the pine trees and then we returned, heading for the car in order to leave. At that moment one of the nuns came out and asked all the visitors if anybody could go to Oropos<sup>[1]</sup> on an errand that the Elder would explain. My friend readily offered to help, immediately, and went into the Elder's brick cell. When the Elder saw him, he was surprised, he thought that we had already left for Athens. My friend said, "Elder, I'm at your service for the job in Oropos." Then the Elder said to him, hesitantly, "Well, we want to offer a little fish for dinner." He took an envelope out from under his robes and shyly gave him some money to pay for the fish. My friend recognised his envelope, smiled and said, "Keep the money Elder, and give me the pleasure of offering you the fish myself." The Elder thanked him repeatedly. On the way to Oropos, my friend related the incident. He thought it was delightfully discreet and enjoyably original. With the Elder, you should always be ready to accept something unexpectedly new, which gave rise to both respect and euphoria.

## *The Television Set*

Once someone gave him a portable television set, as a present. When I saw it in his cell I was taken aback. At some point I asked, "Do you watch television, Elder?" He answered hesitatingly, "Well, they gave it to me as a present. From time to time, I watch the Divine Liturgy<sup>[2]</sup>, because I cannot walk to the Church because of my sicknesses. I also watch the occasional religious program, but I really do not have time. I've got the responsibilities of the monastery, people visiting, phone calls."

A short while later the television set disappeared. The Elder's handling of the matter impressed me. In the beginning he agreed to the television in his cell, in order not to insult the person who made the gift. Then he made a strict, appraised choice of programs, and placed watching television at some point on the scale of the various things he had to do. The final result was that he removed the television set completely, both in order to secure time for his most important tasks and to prevent any ensuing scandalisation of those weak in faith. Besides, he had his own "spiritual television", incomparably more informative and more beneficial than a material television set. The way the Elder handled secular television is an example to us, when we often, quite carelessly and irresponsibly,

deliberate over our choices between bad and worse. We could, instead, raise ourselves up, spiritually, so that we come to choose between what is good and what is better.

### *Why Should We Bother God?*

The Elder was discreet, not only with people, but with God too. It was the time when he had undergone eye surgery. He was in great pain, and had been at death's door. The doctors had written him off completely. The nuns thought about getting his blessing for the Service of Holy Unction.<sup>[3]</sup> The Elder consented. The Service of Holy Unction took place and the pain receded. However, some days later the pain returned. Then the nuns suggested that they do another Holy Unction Service. The Elder, in pain, said, "Why should we bother God? Since the pain left after the first Holy Unction, but returned, it means that God wants me to be in pain. Let's allow His holy will to be done."

<sup>[1]</sup> A ten - fifteen minute drive from the monastery. [*Translator*]

<sup>[2]</sup> Broadcast by State Television in Greece, on Sundays and Major Feasts. [*Translator*]

<sup>[3]</sup> A service in the Orthodox Church for healing the sick, by anointing them with blessed oil, for the health of both body and soul. This service can be performed at any time, for any illness, however minor, not just when someone is on the verge of dying. The service of Holy Unction is clearly based on the teaching of the New Testament. "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call the Elders of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven" (James 14:15). [*Translator*].

## 13. LAUGHTER OF LOVE

### *Innocent, Honest, Humble Laughter*

The Elder sometimes laughed. It was a delightful laugh, pure, like a gurgle of water from a mountain spring. It was, without doubt, quite different to what we are used to in the world. You saw, in his smiling face, the expression simple, honest, love. The Elder was serious. He did not make jokes. He did not try to make you laugh. It poured out on its own from events. It was an innocent laugh, honest, humble and caring, it did not hurt anyone, and made everybody feel jubilant. Most of the time, it took the form of a smile, which revealed the spiritual kindness of his love. Sometimes he faced tragicomic situations. These made you laugh, but you felt the need to stifle the laughter out of respect towards the Elder's gravity. He overcame the comic element and kept to the tragic bit, in order to heal it.

### *But You are a Real Dictator*

Once, when visiting the Elder in his cell, the phone rang, as usual. He told me to pick up the receiver". It was some stranger from a provincial town and asked to speak to the Elder urgently. The Elder picked up the receiver and left the speakerphone open, so that I could hear the conversation.

Elder: "Well then, what do you want to tell me?"

Stranger: "Father Porphyrios, I have a huge problem with my son. He doesn't listen to me. He defies me. He's rude. He doesn't study. He keeps bad company."

Elder: "I see, I see. The boy's got psychological problems. He is rebellious. He makes mistakes. But you yourself are a real Satrap.<sup>[1]</sup>"

Stranger: "Who me?"

Elder: "No, me! You, of course. You still haven't realised it, have you?"



Stranger: “If it’s like that, Father, then the whole thing is very serious. I must come and see you at once.”

Elder: “It’s not necessary for you to come. You’ve already come.”

Stranger: “When did I come there, Father? This is the first time that I’ve spoken to you.”

Elder: “Well, you’ve come here now. You don’t need to travel. Do what I tell you, and you and your son will get along better.”

He then gave him some valuable advice about his spiritual cultivation, and about being gentle and discreet in his behaviour towards his son. During the conversation, I felt the urge to laugh at the strange and unexpected things I heard. However, I suppressed it, seeing the Elder’s serious face, without even a hint of a smile, because he was completely taken up with the stranger’s problem.

### *You Came Here Without Your Glasses?*

Once, while I was talking with the Elder he asked me to find the phone number of one of his spiritual children. It was listed in his phone book. He wanted to speak to him at that moment. I searched my pockets for my glasses, but in vain. “Elder,” I said, “unfortunately I cannot read your phone book.”

“Why?” he asked, in surprise.

“Because I’ve left my glasses at home,” I answered.

The Elder answered in a loud voice, saying, “You came here without your glasses, kid? What am I to do with you now? Next time, if you don’t have your glasses, don’t come to see me.” I was unable not to laugh at this “reproach” by the Elder. Anyway, from then on, each time that I set off to visit him, the first thing I remembered to take with me was my glasses.

### *Kid, Are You Stupid?*

A young man visited him, and amongst other things he said to him, “Elder, I want to have lots of women.” Then the Elder said, “Kid, are you stupid?” There could not have been a shrewder retort characterising the young man’s desire.

### *Looking for a Name*

He told me about a very interesting incident, one day. At the very moment that my attention had reached its height I heard him saying, “That man came to see me, as I was saying, and he was from this village... Now what was it called, what was it called... Let me see... Well, I’ll be blessed, I’ve forgotten it now.”

“It doesn’t matter, Elder,” I said in eagerness to hear the rest, “Whatever it was called it’s not important. Go on with the story.” The Elder said, “Oh boy! Now then, I had just remembered it. How could I forget it? They called it... they called it...” The Elder stopped the story, trying to remember. I complained, “Forget the name of the village, Elder, it’s not worth stopping for that. Carry on.” There was a moment of quiet, then the Elder suddenly exclaimed, “Daphnophyto they called it!” He looked at me triumphantly and said, “Did you see how I found it?” I laughed with all my soul. The scene was unprecedented. I was sitting in front of a grace-filled Elder, who had been humbly telling me about his most amazing spiritual achievements, while at the same time, celebrating like a small child because he managed to remember the name of a village. I saw a combination of intelligent wisdom and naivete of heart, remarkable in its simplicity, unfold before me. I did not feel that my laughter affected my respect for the Elder. Indeed, I felt the contrary. Besides, he was laughing himself. Then he let slip, “You know, I once told a bishop that I sometimes laugh, and that my visitors laughed, too. Is that a sin? And the bishop told me that “If the laughter has humility and love, it is not a sin.” The Elder’s laughter was angelic, because he “rejoiced with those who rejoice, and wept with those who weep” (Rom. 12:15).

### *How He Avoided the Insistent Lady*

Following the insistent request of a certain lady, known to a friend of mine, I agreed to pass on her complaint to the Elder. This was despite the objections that I myself expressed. “Why did he confirm that her daughters three wishes would come true, when not one of them did?” The Elder looked at me inquisitively, “Kid, isn’t she perhaps like that other lady who came here the other day?”

“What happened with her?” I asked. The Elder explained, “This lady came and said, “I want you to confirm that these following five things I wish for me and my children will actually happen.” I told her that I could not make such a confirmation and that on her last visit I explained what she had to do, as a Christian, so that she could have some hope of having what she wished for come true. She insisted on her own things, without wanting to grasp what I was telling her. In the meantime, time was passing by, and lots of people had gathered in the corridor waiting. I could not get rid of her.”

“Elder,” I said, interrupting, annoyed on my own account, “why didn’t you throw her out and keep your peace and quiet?” Then the Elder said, “She wouldn’t leave, my child, do you understand? Look, she caught hold of the leg of my bed and says to me, “I won’t leave until you tell me that all those things I want to happen will come true.” What could I do? Could I force her out? Can I?

want to happen will come true. What could I do? Could I force her out? Can I? Then I thought about it and I said to her, “Oh you blessed thing, what do you want from me?” She replied, “Tell me if the first thing that I want will happen?”

I say, “it will happen.”

“The second”

“That will also happen.”

“The third, the fourth, the fifth thing?”

“They’ll also happen.”

Then the lady jumped up with joy and thanked me as she left. But, as soon as she reached the door, I called out to her loudly, “All those things will happen, if you do all the things I told you to do like a good Christian.” But the lady made out that she didn’t hear it. She did not put anything I told her into practice and not one of those things she wanted to happen happened. Following this, she turned round and told the people who knew her that I had told her one thing, and another had occurred. What can one say?”

I was amazed by the Elder’s inventiveness, according to divine enlightenment, whereby he was freed from the lady’s tactless pressure, while at the same time giving her the spiritual message that she should heed. At first I laughed at the turn the incident took, but in the end I was sad at its result. It showed the inability of some people, who try, using the Elder, to adapt God’s will to their own will. Whereas, it is in their interests to do just the opposite. The lady whose complaint I passed on, as it turned out, was very much like the “other lady”. She insistently asked for her daughter’s wishes to come true, with complete indifference to the spiritual preconditions, which the Elder had set.

<sup>[1]</sup> *Satrap* = a Persian tyrant, i.e. a dictator, someone who is oppressive. *[Translator]*.

## 14. FINANCIAL MATTERS

While the Elder lived spiritually, he was not indifferent to material things. He was interested in catering to both the spiritual and the material of his children. This was because he knew that man is a psychosomatic hypostasis, that is, a person is made up of both body and soul. He advised his visitors to be hard working, productive, to save money, to invest it correctly, to avoid waste and unnecessary expenses. He faced and solved the financial problems of his spiritual children, better than the best financial expert could have. He always linked material gain with spiritual gain, so that material gains would serve spiritual ones and not vice-versa. A good financial expert knows how to subject a small gain to a greater one.

### *We Only Manage Our Material Goods*

The Elder saw the essence of the matter and was not influenced by external forms and superficial financial systems. One day he said to me, “You know, somebody can live in a mansion and go to Paradise? Whether we go to Paradise or whether we go to hell does not depend on whether we have plenty of money or not, but on the way we use what we’ve got. Money, property and all our material goods are not ours. They belong to God; we only manage them. We should know that God will want to settle accounts with us to the very last penny, whether we spent it according to His Will or not?”

### *Investment on Heaven and on Earth*

He joyfully told a friend who had made a substantial financial donation to a charitable cause, in the name of Christ, “Now your money has really got results”. It was the best investment because the money was placed there where, “neither moth nor rust destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal” (Matt. 6:19)

He took a personal interest in the case of a widowed mother, who had some

money laid aside. He saw that it was invested in the purchase of a good piece of building land, as a material safeguard for the orphans. With regard to their spiritual safeguarding, he undertook that from the moment they became fatherless, with his fervent prayers. In this way he fulfilled the Biblical words, “The Lord releives the fatherless and the widow”.

### *Gift and Loan*

Another friend wanted to help someone and gave them quite a respectable sum as an interest-free loan. When he discussed the matter with the Elder he said, “That money’s gone, don’t expect it back. It is better to give rather than to loan. When you lend something, the first thing you should think is that it will not be returned. This way you lay your mind to rest, and you are not anxious, in case you lose it. If it’s returned to you, take it. If it isn’t given back, you should tell yourself, “I’ve given that away as a gift; it’s accorded to my charitable works.” My friend replied, “What you’re telling me is correct, Elder, but the person might not have the means to give it back to me now, and may return it some years later.” The Elder: “It’s the same thing. You’re still giving it away. If three and a half years pass you give it away with the interest that you haven’t received.” My friend made a rough calculation and established that more years would be needed. The Elder interrupted, “Is that the sort of calculation you make? You’ve excluded the interest from the amount that gains interest each year.” The Elder was right. My friend had forgotten the compound interest. He then asked, “How are you so sure that three and a half years are needed.” The Elder: “Well, that’s what I say. I haven’t made any kind of calculation, but it seems to me that it’s like so.” When my friend returned to his office, he made an exact calculation on his computer. The result was three years and seven months. When he saw the Elder again he said to him, “Elder, you made a mistake in your reckoning about the time-scale. The Elder was taken aback, and asked, “How much of a mistake?” Then he replied, “only a month.” The Elder laughed with satisfaction and said, “Did you see how close I came, kid? Well, that’s the way it came to me and I said three and a half years.” The incident once again showed how much divine enlightenment the Elder had, even with mathematical calculations and how closely his words came to those of Christ, “Lend hoping for nothing in return” (Lk. 6:35)

### *Act as Though You are Poor*

He gave the following advice to a widow, “Work and pray. Don’t spread your

money around. Act as though you are poor. Take the change they give back to you in the street market. Don't tell your children that you've got money, give them only a little, and if they complain, tell them that we have to be careful because it will run out. Don't trust anyone regarding financial matters, not even your own brother."

### *Safeguard Your Property*

He told a friend, "I know it's a bother running around to safeguard your property, but what can you do? If you are indifferent, the others eat into it. That will be bad for both them and you. Be strict with them." The Elder said that knowing how lenient my friend was. He only followed his advice in part and did not completely avoid being wronged.

### *Don't Concern Yourself with Such Details*

A friend, with ascetic tendencies, wanted to keep a small amount of money for his individual needs. He would give away the rest of the money that he earned to charity. However, he hesitated to live on such a small amount of money. He told the Elder about this thought. The Elder replied, "You blessed thing, you sit there and concern yourself with such details. Keep as much money as you want for yourself and give everything in your effort to love Christ more, and all these problems will be solved on their own."

### *I bought a Knitting Machine and Worked*

One summer morning I went to visit him in the mobile home where he then lived. As I looked out on the beautiful piece of land that he had bought, with a pine forest all around, I wondered who the benefactor was. Upon entering the mobile home the Elder said, "Do you see how beautiful the monastery land is? I bought it with my savings." I looked at him in wonder and I asked myself, "What savings could a retired hieromonk make, who not only provides for himself, but also for his sister and his niece?" After a short pause, the Elder said to me, "You'll probably ask me, where I found the money. Well, I bought a knitting machine and I worked." Again my disbelieving thoughts had doubts, "And what could a knitting machine bring in?" Then the Elder continued, "Work, I tell you, lots of work, do you understand me? We took orders for knitwear and we worked from dawn till dusk for many years. We worked on the knitting machine, me, my sister, and my niece. In this way we fixed up the

leaven so that we could buy the property for the monastery.”<sup>[1]</sup> The diligence and thrift of the Elder and his family amazed me. I was also amazed by the way he convinced me. On the outside, it seemed that the Elder was talking on his own, and that I was silent. In reality, however, he was having a conversation with my thoughts. He tried to convince me with his arguments. I was disbelieving with innermost objections and he answered each silent doubt of mine, in words. To be honest, it was an unconventional conversation, which only God could have.

### *Why Such Large Buildings?*

Years rolled pass, little by little the buildings started to rise up imposingly, with the Elder’s leaven. This reminded me of the words the Apostle Paul: “a little leaven leavens the whole lump.” One afternoon I returned from the monastery draught-shop. I had seen the lovely designs for the buildings being raised up and asked myself, “Why such large buildings?” I had seen and heard so much from the Elder by now that I was no longer surprised when he read my thoughts, as though they were enclosed within a box of transparent crystal. As soon as he saw me he said, cheerfully, “Did you see the designs the girls, the engineers, made? Did you see how beautiful they are? The church and all the buildings will be built just like you’ve seen them in the designs. Don’t consider them large. It’s not as though I’m building them for myself. I’ll leave in a short while and I won’t take them with me. They’ll remain here so that many people can come from different parts in order to become holy and be saved.” The future will confirm the Elder’s prophecy.

<sup>[1]</sup> Publisher’s note: In the meantime the number of knitting machines increased and the workshop even took on some employees.

## 15. RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO SEXES

### *Not Strict, Not Lenient. Simply: Correct*

Regarding the important, yet delicate, matter of relations between the two sexes, the Elder was paternally discreet. Nobody could give him the conventional attribute of strict, or lenient, because, simply put, he was correct. He was right outside, and above the demonology of the sex-centred morality of the “strict”, as well as from the angelification and erotic expurgation of the “lenient”. He followed the straight road of Christ, as found in Holy Scripture and the Orthodox patristic tradition.

Souls who were terrified by the threats of the “hesitant” conservatives visited his cell as well as souls broken by the experiences of the “bold” modernisers. He surrounded them all with the same love and had the most suitable medicine for each one. Respecting the distinctiveness of each soul, he opened up the road to self-knowledge, repentance, purification and then, the calm and free choice between connubial love in blessed marriage or the divine eros of virginity in Christ and dedication to Him.

### *Psychosomatic Attraction, Good Or Bad?*

I once asked, “Elder, is the psychosomatic attraction that develops between a man and a woman demonic?” He replied, “Sometimes yes, sometimes no. It depends.”

The next time we met, I returned to the subject, and he answered more specifically. “You know, happiness within marriage, as it is called, exists, but it has a precondition: The husband and wife will have to first acquire a spiritual fortune, by loving Christ and keeping his commandments. In that way they will come to truly love each other and be happy. Otherwise, they will be poor in soul. They won’t be able to give love and they will have demonic problems, that will



make them miserable.”

Another time he was vivid. I asked, “Elder, I’ve heard that the problem of unsatisfiable sensual and emotional desire between the two sexes is insoluble, and is only solved with the grave. The Elder reacted strongly, “No, kid, don’t call it a problem. It’s like so.” Then he made a characteristic movement with the palm of his hand and his finger above his bed covers. He showed something crawling forward that starts to rise off the ground, little by little, and finally it is raised up in the sky. The image he gave was in complete opposition to the romantic descriptions of ecstatic lovers, who start high up, and gradually lose height and finally come down to earth unevenly. The Elder’s image was directly connected to the “spiritual fortune” whose presence or absence creates the upward or downward movement accordingly.

### *Love For the Sinner*

One day he said to me, “Both boys and girls come here sometimes. Those poor kids, what haven’t they done, they’ve committed all the carnal sins, but I still love them.” The Elder did not justify the actions of these young people. He called them carnal sins, but at the same time, he loved these young people, as valuable souls for whom Christ had died. He attracted them like a magnet, with his love, and he gradually cured them from their carnal adoration. Certain puritan conservatives misunderstood this paternal stance of the Elder. Certain irresponsible fans of “progress”, who had celebrated because the Elder was supposedly “tolerant” of carnal sin, also now lamented. They did not realise that sin is not fought off by the intolerant condemnation of the sinner, or by the guilty justification of the fall. The Elder fought off sin decisively. He loved the sinner, and helped him become consciously aware of his responsibility for his fall, and of the possibility, in Christ, of being freed from them and the guilt. This, through repentance and the forgiveness of a life in Christ. He wanted to lead them on to a new life and not to torment souls with the past one.

### *Advice About Marriage*

The Elder directed those who desired to be married towards the creation of a truly happy family. He told me the following with regard to this: “A good young man came to me and asked me to help him form a Christian family. I told him to find a modest and chaste girl from a village, outside of Athens. He listened to me. He found a girl with a very good soul in a village. He liked her, and proposed marriage. They got married, and had some beautiful children, little dolls. Now they live a simple, and happy, family life.” The Elder saw that the

many, complicated and farfetched worldly merits of candidates for marriage, that mainly satisfied their selfish outlook, was anything but a guarantee of happiness in marriage.

The Elder helped those who wanted to get married. One day he said to me, “One day an older single lady visited me. She had a good character, but had despaired of marriage. I told her that we should pray together about her difficulty before the icon of the Mother of God. As soon as we had finished praying I said, “You’ll get married, and very soon.” She went back to her village and was soon visited by a matchmaker. She told her that a good man, a Greek-Australian had come to Greece to find a wife but had been disappointed and would leave the next day without having achieved anything. She suggested a meeting. The meeting happened the next day, and the day after that the engagement, and in a few days the marriage and the departure for Australia.”

An acquaintance of mine told me that the Elder united him with his wife. Not only that, but he protected them from future pitfalls. He said that, “If the Elder had not been by our side our marriage would have blown up in the air.”

### *Problem Couple - Problem Child*

The Elder told a young couple that visited him, “Because you two don’t love each other, the child you will have, will have problems.” The Elder’s prophecy came true, as events showed. The Elder, of course, did not consider it a prophecy, but the deterministic relation between two factors (lack of love between husband and wife -problematic character of the child.) The Elder proved in practice the validity of the educational theory that a child’s development starts from the moment of conception.<sup>[1]</sup>

### *Confronting the Mistake*

Someone who had made a rushed and completely emotional choice for a wife. He had grave marital and more generally family problems that he discussed with the Elder. On one occasion he said to him, “Anyway, you have made the great mistake. That cannot be fixed. Now we’ll see how we can confront the consequences of the mistake with the greatest success.” The Elder was a realist. He did not idealise the visitor’s mistaken choice, but he also did not let him become disappointed, when he became consciously aware of the irrevocability of his mistake. He led him into an effort for the best confrontation of the disagreeable effects of the mistake and this effort was a success, acceptable to God.

## *Your Little Child Will Unite You*

The Elder told a couple that had intense difficulties, which troubled their small child, “You two are now separated, but your little child will unite you. Don’t quarrel in front of him, because you’ll wound his soul. Use his innocence as an example. Don’t pull him back with your discord. Let him move forward, and hold you both by the hand, to pull you both forward too. You child in the middle and you to the left and to the right of him, held by his little hands so that you can all move forward and upward together.” It was some vivid advice from the Elder, which lent itself to an artist’s canvas. It reminds one of Christ’s words, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the Kingdom of God” (Mk. 10:14) and “unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the Kingdom of Heaven” (Matt. 18:3).

## *In a House of Ill-Repute*

Through the suffering of Christian compassion, the Elder could even face the souls who had sunken into the most disreputable form of relationship between the two sexes: professional prostitution. He divulged to me, “Once, years ago, I was blessing houses with Holy Water<sup>2</sup>. I go into a house chanting and I see one lady leaving from here, another hiding over there. In the beginning, I didn’t realize. Then I understood that it was one of those houses, a house of ill repute. What could I do? I had gone into that house without knowing it. The madam came and said it wasn’t right for them to kiss the cross. I said that, “I don’t know if it is not right for them or not right for you.” They asked to kiss the cross. I let them. They kissed the cross, and I told them that Christ loves them. They were moved. I felt sorry for them the poor wretches. What do you think? Did I do the right thing?” Taken aback by the rare incident and even more taken aback by the Elder’s question I said, “Elder, your asking me, a lukewarm Christian, if you did the right thing? I think that you did very well. Christ came to call all sinners to repentance.” The Elder listened to me, smiling with satisfaction.

## *I Started With Something Easy*

He was very discreet with various related problems that were presented to him. He told me, “One day, I was visited by an actress, in complete despair, because she had been dumped by her beau. I saw her soul. What did I see? A complete ruin. Where could I begin? I started with something easy. I gave her a rule to do something every day. If I tell you what it was, you’ll laugh. Yet, that’s

where I had to start with that soul. By doing that light thing that I told her to do, seeing as she was well disposed her soul would mellow and she would come again. Then I would tell her to do something more serious, and then, little by little, she would approach Christ.” The Elder’s pastoral art brought the words of St. Paul to mind, “I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.”

### *A Sick Relationship*

The Elder helped normalise “mixed-up” situations. This was, of course, on the precondition that the interested person would also contribute. Once, a young man wanted to form a proper family, and thought about proposing marriage a sincere young lady. However, he considered it necessary to ask the Elder before doing anything. He went to visit him. When the Elder saw him he said, “I see that your soul is disordered. You keep an old, sick relationship with an unstable girl on hold. When you are with her, she is bored with you; she looks down on you and rejects you. When you go away, she’s jealous of you, she wants you and she calls you. If you do not break it off with her once and for all, you will not be freed, to form the family that you want. Now she’s rejected you. If she calls you to explain, supposedly repentant, don’t go. You’ll only end up staying with her again and you’ll continue with the same story, without stop.” The young man did not listen to him. At her first invitation he went, with self-assurance, in order to clear up the matter in person. The result was that he stayed with her and the Elder’s prediction was fulfilled.

### *An Unstable Soul*

Sometimes the “mix-up” was deeper and its solution was not just a matter of correct handling of an external problem. The Elder recounted, “A girl used to come to me from time to time. I saw her soul from the very first moment. She visited a women’s monastery once. One day the Abbess came to me. “What should I do with that girl, Elder?” she said to me. “She’s very much desires to become a nun.” I replied, “Do not make her a nun.” She did not listen to me and she dressed her up as one. Some time later the Abbess came to visit me again. She was very upset. “I made a great mistake by not listening to you,” she told me. “That girl threw away her monastic robes, and she was seen dancing in worldly clothes at some celebration.”

“What am I to do with you now?” I said to her. A few days passed and what would you know, the girl came to see me. “I’m in despair,” she said, “I’m in two minds. I don’t know if I should become a nun or get married.” I said to her

himself. I don't know if I should become a nun or get married. I said to her, "You should do neither. You won't do as a nun, or as a married woman. The only place for you is the hippie-camp at Matala. You do whatever you find in front of you."

"Why?" she asked angrily.

"Because," I said to her, "You're not stable. You are like a windmill that blows in whichever direction the wind blows. If you find yourselves with Christians you are a Christian, if you find yourself with worldly people you are worldly, if you found yourself with hippies you would go to Matala with them. Sometimes you go here, at other times there, you have not obtained your own convictions."

### *She'll Make You Holy With Her Crankiness*

Someone that I knew was considering a match proposed for himself. However, he was hesitant because he saw that the proposed bride had some grave faults. I advised him to visit the Elder. He discerned and listed all the faults of the prospective wife and finished off by saying enigmatically, "But marriage is like that."

"How is it like that, Elder?" he asked him. The Elder replied, "Well, with her crankiness, she'll make you and you'll make her holy." With this he evidently meant that if he married her he would have to exercise patience, tolerance, understanding of others, forgiveness and, in general, all the virtues. Consequently, he would become a saint. Upon hearing this, the interested party rejected the match made for him. He was not bold enough to follow such a path to sanctification.

### *Onward Now to Holiness*

A believing young man, who had become engaged to a young lady who was rather indifferent to the faith, visited the Elder, to get his advice. The Elder, who found himself before an accomplished fact, immediately "saw" the weaknesses of the fiancée. He told him, characteristically, "Onward now to holiness. There is no other solution for you. Make a great effort to become holy, more and more so each day. Your wife will see your face shine with Christ's joy and will envy you and want to imitate you." The Elder found the most suitable solution to each and every problem.

### *A Sensitivity for Holiness*

One day he told me the following, “Once a young man came to me and told me that when he was travelling on a ship he saw a beautiful and attractive girl opposite him and he was stunned. Then I saw his soul and said, “You blessed thing, with all the sensitivity that God has given you, you ought to have become a saint by now.” Perhaps another spiritual father would have seen the incident as a chance to fume at the sinner. However, the Elder saw the chance to uncover for him the divine gift of his great sensitivity and his potential to become a saint through that, “fighting eros with eros and fire put out by immaterial fire.”

### *The Gravity of Carnal Sin*

He told a mother, “Be careful and pray, that your children don’t fall into carnal sin. Of course, one sins in thought, but more lightly, but with carnal intercourse one sins much more heavily, because deep changes and harm come to the soul by it.”

### *The Sources of Sin*

The Elder pointed out the doorways by which sin enters, internally through thoughts and externally through the senses. One day, when in a friend’s car, we passed by a gypsy camp. It was the well-known scene of their camp, with surrounding speakers, continually playing bawdy modern folk music of gypsy preference. The Elder was silent. I, however, frowned on those people in my thoughts, for their cultural level in general and their listening habits in particular. Then I heard the Elder interrupting my thoughts saying, “The poor gypsies. What can they do? They play those songs to gain comfort in their misery.” I wondered: Did the Elder then agree with their musical preferences? Then the Elder, again knowing my thoughts said, “Of course, I’m not saying that those songs are good.”

### *The Best Music*

With inner enlightenment, the Elder knew about my love for music in general. He wanted to help me in that area. One afternoon, as we were walking through the pine-forest he said to me, “It’s good to listen to music. The most superior music is Byzantine music, because it doesn’t agitate the soul. Instead, it unites it with God and puts it completely at ease. If you really want to, you can listen to secular music, but I say that it’s better to listen to music that doesn’t have words.”

## *Marriage or Not*

With a company of six or seven friends, who were all single then, we sat under a pine tree one summer afternoon listening to the Elder talk to us about the matter. “Don’t be tormented by the problem of choosing between marriage and celibacy. Sometimes days come when you have great desires of the flesh and soul for marriage, and sometimes those desires withdraw, because you feel divine desires, more than marriage. When pleasure - seeking temptations come do not try and drive them away by force, because Satan benefits. He makes them even more attractive and harms you. It is better to face them calmly and convert them from sinfulness to purity. Say, “We may get married and enjoy the pleasures of marital relations, as Christ wants. When desires for virginity come, accept them with gratitude, secretly cultivating the art of sanctification. At some point, the scales will fall down on one side or the other. Others try to become holy by fighting against their passions and their sins, and others by loving Christ and His will. The former achieve only a few things, because their effort is very cold and hard. The latter achieve a lot more, because by loving Christ sinful passions lose their appeal and power before the joy and love of Christ that they feel. When dawn breaks and the light of the sun enters your room all the darkness leaves immediately and unavoidably.” The Elder stopped speaking and it seemed like he was thinking about something. Then he spoke again, “Perhaps I shouldn’t be telling you this, but I’ll tell you anyway: Someone may reach quite a mature age and still be in two minds about marriage and celibacy. Then Satan will attack him as harshly as he can. He’ll make him panic in his soul about being unmarried. Then he’ll anxiously start looking for a spouse. He’ll ask people to find him a spouse. They laugh at him all together and he will end up in state of sickness of soul. That’s why I’m telling you not to get stuck on the question - marriage or celibacy? Rather than wearing yourself out, vainly trying to find the answer for yourself, spend all your effort in trying to love Christ with all your soul. Then He will give you, at the most suitable time, the answer that suits your soul. You’ll accept it not with force or distress, but calmly with thanksgiving. Then you’ll be freed from that question forever. You’ll walk along the right road, giving glory to God.”

A friend was facing the dilemma of marriage or celibacy. The Elder offered many prospects of salvation and so he was freed from the anxiety of the dilemma, even before he had decided one way or the other. He did this by saying, “Don’t torment yourself unfairly, by putting pressure on yourself to make the choice now. Free yourself from that persistent thought and give all your attention to how to love Christ who loves you. Everything belongs to

Christ, our past as well as our present and our future, where His Providence is revealed even to the very last detail of our lives. You could have a family; you could go, wherever you like, to dedicate yourself. You could, however, do none of those things and stay at home, as you are now, again you can be saved, it is enough that you love Christ. Christ will bring about the solution that suits you most, that will speak clearly in your heart. Do not be sad, you are on Christ's road even now."

Another friend had great difficulty in getting married. The Elder revealed to him that the deep down cause of his long drawn out inhibitions towards marriage was a teenage crush that was not realised. He said to him, "You loved her with all the strength of your soul. You made her your life's ideal. You were wounded by her indifference. You were broken in two. You tried to find her face in the face of every girl that they had arranged for you as a match. But, since that was impossible, your heart has remained shut." With the Elder's help, he became consciously aware of this hidden obstacle; he was freed from it, once and for all, and thus able to form his own family.

Someone that I knew went and asked the Elder what suited him more: marriage in Christ or virginity in Christ. He got a quite unexpected answer from the Elder: "You suit both." Following that answer he asked, which of them was more in his interests, since both were within reach. The Elder, in his discretion, did not give him an answer. Perhaps he decided that there was no reason for him to give it, because it already exists in the Gospel. That man was clearly one of those "to whom it had been given" and consequently "he could accept the saying" (Matt. 19: 11) about practising virginity for the "kingdom of heaven".

Despite this, the Elder waited for certain defining events to happen. He then told him, what had also become apparent to the man in question. He told him that God had now spoken to him clearly about him about what was in his best interests, both according to the Gospel and events. He reached the point of telling him, "If you, however, prefer marriage you are free to choose it even now. Anyway, I ring an alarm bell. My dear, marriages are beyond us now." With delightful modesty, he placed himself amongst those who could no longer think about marriage. This, despite the fact, as well known, he had made his choice from his boyhood and had never thought of marriage.

The Elder's visitor made his final decision and settled the matter for himself. Now, however, he had to face his parents. He had not told them of his decision, in order not to upset them, and they, unawares, put pressure on him to form a family. This created some irritation for him and he turned to the Elder again. The Elder quite naturally repeated word for word all that his parents had told him regarding the matter, as though he had been in man's house. "Now your parents



are saying, “How long will you remain like that? It’s time you settled down. It’s time you start your own home, with your wife and children. If you remain like that who’s going to look after you in your old age?” Don’t misunderstand them. They are also right from their point of view. If you were in their position, you would say the same thing. They look at things in a secular manner. They want you to live well and to have a good old age. But aren’t there more than a few people who form a family, are deserted by their children and have a difficult old age? The most important thing, everything, is for a person to love Christ and all other problems are then sorted out.” My acquaintance expressed his admiration for the Elder to me. With great discretion the Elder had focused him towards what was in his greatest interest, but also justified his parents stance, and his own, with understanding.

### *Leading a Bride to Christ*

A friend told me that in the first few years of his youth he had fallen in love “platonically” with a certain young girl. He kept his dream a secret until he opened his own office in Athens and was established professionally. Then he revealed his feelings for her and proposed marriage to her, but she refused. Their paths then separated. He met Fr. Porphyrios who brought him to Christ and his life changed. Many years later the lady turned up in his path unexpectedly. There was no longer any possibility of marriage for either of them. However, there was an immediate need to help her with a serious problem that she had. He did the best he could possibly do for her: He put her in touch with Elder Porphyrios. With the Elder, she discovered the path for her soul’s salvation. As for him, the Elder told him joyfully, “God made you worthy so that instead of being her bridegroom you led her as a bride to Christ.”

<sup>[1]</sup> Publisher’s note: This view is also explained in the excellent book, “Reflections on Children in the Orthodox Church Today” by Sr. Magdalen of the Stavropegic Monastery of St. John the Baptist, Essex, England, and currently published by St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press.

<sup>[2]</sup> In Greece, on the Feast of Theophany (5th-6th January), the priest usually visits all the houses in his parish and blesses them with Holy Water. This is the event referred to here. [Translator].

## 16. A VARIETY OF GIFTS

Apart from the divine gifts, which we have mentioned so far, the Elder had many others that made him like a mountain slope adorned with colourful wild flowers. He had so many gifts and such a variety of them that you asked yourself not what gifts he had, but what gifts he did not have! Usually his words and his actions revealed more than one gift each time. He was able to comprehend the most dissimilar people in depth, and gave soul saving solutions to their most disparate problems. You realised that he knew nearly everything. He had an enlightened opinion on every subject, from the most practical to the most theoretical, from the most general to the most specialised.

### *The Gifts as an Instrument of Salvation*

The most admirable thing was that the Elder did not use those gifts as an end in themselves. Rather, he used them as a means to serve his sole aim: The liberation of the soul from the devil's sway and its entrance into the paradise of the "earthly uncreated Church of Christ," as he called it. This great aim was only slightly noticed by most people, and this hurt the Elder. Most people were impressed by the means he used, his gifts. The Elder could have astonished everyone, in time, but he did not want that. The Elder did not come into our lives like a miracle maker, like a magician, in order to serve up easy, incidental, solutions convenient to our bodily and intellectual laziness. He came as a labourer of God, to minister to the work of our salvation in Christ, in co-operation with us.

One day he said to me, "Some people come to me and I see that their soul is in ruins. But they are not aware of their own condition and so they ask for other things from me. They tell me about other problems of theirs, without knowing their own problem. I tell them about it, but they don't understand. They do not pay attention to what I tell them, because their mind is fixed on their problems, on their own will. Then, so that they wouldn't leave without benefiting I was

sometimes obliged to use the gifts that God gave me. I would reveal secrets about themselves to them, about their relatives, their village and other such things, so that they would marvel. Then, I would win their attention, so that they would listen to what I wanted to tell them in the interest of their soul.”

Some people listened to what the Elder said, carefully, some only slightly and others did not listen at all. Whoever appreciated this in time opened their ears and closed their mouth and listened to his words very carefully. Then they left his cell filled with enthusiasm, thanking the Elder and giving glory to God, because they went asking for ten presents and left with thousands. With his typical simplicity and directness of speech the Elder was in the habit of giving the following advice to the visitor: “Do not be upset with the problems you told me about, close in on them, don’t keep going round and round them in circles. Free yourself from them and move ahead, giving all your attention and labour to how you will be worthy of Christ’s love. This, by knowing His commandments and keeping them. By occupying yourself with Christ’s commandments, you’ll see that all your problems will be solved on their own. You’ll see that you’ve entered the paradise of the uncreated Church of Christ, which starts from here.”

The Elder was overjoyed when he saw humble souls ready to hear his words willingly and were prepared to advance towards the great goal straightaway. This, without them waiting for him to first offer them the uneven means of impressing them with his gifts, which affected their free will, in some way. The Elder followed the example of Christ, who did not call those who had seen and believed blessed, but those who had “not seen and yet believed”. Since those who “have not seen” appreciably are not those without eyes, but those who see spiritually.

My spiritual father kept a similar stance to the Elder towards the subject. One day he received a visit from a peculiar stranger, a collector of accounts about miracles. The following dialogue took place between them:

Stranger: Father, I’ve heard a lot about your gifts. Tell me, have you seen miracles?

Spiritual Father: Miracles? Plenty of them.

Stranger: (Enthusiastic) I would like you to tell me about the most remarkable miracle that you’ve seen.

Spiritual Father: The most remarkable miracle that I’ve seen is that I’m the greatest sinner in the world and that Christ is my Saviour.

Stranger: (Disappointed). Is that all you have to tell me?

Spiritual Father: Is there a more remarkable miracle in all the world than that? The unknown visitor left, feeling bitter.

Although the Elder was saddened, he did not get angry when he saw souls that

were slack, idle, selfish, unprepared. He was immeasurably tolerant and accommodating with our sins. He did not do that in order to justify them, but to prompt our resolve to fight against them. In order to help us in that battle he resorted to using his gifts. These filled the visitor's soul with surprise and awe. Sometimes he satisfied pilgrim's requests in a miraculous manner, but never without deeper spiritual reference. He did not try to be agreeable only temporarily. Rather, he wanted to be permanently useful. He really would have done the pilgrims an injustice if he limited himself to solving their short-lived problems and kept the door shut to paradise, where there are no problems. When, however, he saw that there was no possibility for this spiritual reference for the soul's salvation, because of selfish resistance, he did not use his gifts. This, so that he would not burden his visitor's position by offering them presents that they would not make use of. He waited for the resistance to wane. He was silent, but he was not indifferent to them. He helped them through his prayer, which was more effective than his words. He did not abandon anyone without help, even if many misinterpreted his silence. Sometimes his silence was caused by spasms from his many sicknesses, at other times from the absence of specific inner guidance about the matter in hand, and at other times, only God knows the reason.

### *Man's Opinion and God's Opinion*

One afternoon I visited him at the monastery and asked his opinion about an urgent matter of mine. He said, "I'm very sick and I can't concentrate. Do you want me to answer you now, with my reason, where there's a danger of me making a mistake or do you want to come tomorrow morning, when I hope that I'll be well, so that I can concentrate?" I said, "Don't answer me now, Elder, I'll come tomorrow morning." I got my answer the following morning.

### *Satan Fooled Us*

On another visit, I found the Elder dumbstruck. He said to me, "Oh, what's become of us! We've been fooled by Satan."

"What's the matter, Elder?" I asked him anxiously. Then he explained, "Do you remember that person, who I sent to speak to someone he knew? So that he would convince him to come to me and I could get him out of his satanic mix-up, since many people had asked me to do that? Well, that person went and did just the opposite. He went and found the person he knew and accused me, by saying that I'm a charlatan and that I make a mockery of people. Did you hear

that? How can that person come and see me now? If I knew that he would have accused me, I wouldn't have sent him. Now I see that Satan also influenced him, that he has psychological problems. Now it's too late, the harm's been done. Tell me, how did Satan fool me! That rarely happens to me."

But what was the final outcome? The devil's joy was short, because the same person fell into the pit that he had dug for the Elder. I was told that precisely this spiritual damage that he caused was transformed, with God's secret intervention, in to great spiritual gain, for many people. The strategy of God's wisdom crushed the tactics of the devil's treachery. In the end, the Elder celebrated his heaven sent victory and the devil grieved over his self-entrapment. Unusually, God allowed the Elder to be fooled by the devil so that many people would realise that with Christ the Christian finally wins in the end. This, even when he is crushed temporarily by the devil. Moreover, the devil is finally beaten even when he triumphs temporarily over the Christian.

### *We'll Fool Him Too*

Following that incident I often heard the Elder warn me, while smiling, "Be careful. Do what I tell you, but silently. Onward, to fool Satan."

The Elder, with the grace of Christ, knew the "ways of the devil". He was not "ignorant of his devices" (2 Cor. 2:11). He saw his deceiving tactical manoeuvres and his fiendish strategies. He was aware of his manslaughtering intentions and he blocked his path effectively, and this provoked his profound hatred. Indeed, he also tried to initiate us into this knowledge, as far as it was possible. One day he said to me, "When you pray for someone that the devil annoys with sinful passions, don't tell him about it because the devil will learn of it and will stir up resistance within his soul. Then your prayer will not achieve results. Pray for him, but in secret. Then your prayer will help him a great deal." Another time he said to me, "Be especially careful of the demon of listlessness. When it goes into a person it does not go in on its own, but it is followed by a host of other demons. Just like as in the past, with great leaders, who went ahead with a flamboyant procession, seated on a throne, which their many servants had lifted up on to their shoulders."

### *Gradual Intervention*

Each time that Souls came to the Elder wounded by the "fiery darts of the evil-one that move treacherously against us". Each time he would try to heal their wounds, by performing, as far as possible, the most painless operations. Once, the Elder was visited by a very well educated, very sensitive worldly

Once, the Elder was visited by a very well-educated, very sensitive worldly lady, who was most disappointed and weighed down with grave sins (that she just about recognised). She came to express her grief. The Elder comforted her. He guided her, telling her how to be freed of her insecurity. As for her sins, he gave her the impression (as she herself said) of a good mother who warns her little daughter because she has broken her dolls while playing. In the following visits her therapy moved ahead, gradually, to greater and more painful depths.

### *Direct Intervention*

Sometimes, however, he was “informed” that the sickness required direct and drastic intervention. Then, even on the very first visit, he did not hesitate to use a surgeon’s knife in order to remove the patient’s abscess. Thus, when another educated and cultured lady came to him in order to wail about her troubles, because her child had some nervous illness, the Elder came down hard on her. He told her that her child had become ill because of her pride and that he would be cured if she becomes humble and holy. The lady left the Elder’s cell crushed and choking in her tears. However, in the visits that followed, he comforted her and he gave her a lot of courage and plenty of hope about her child’s cure and her own spiritual progress.

In some cases the Elder’s therapeutic intervention was limited to the advice, “Do what God enlightens you to do” and in others, a silent blessing. Every operation was successful, according to the needs and abilities of each person.

### *What Does “Eneos” Mean?*

Most of the time the Elder’s spiritual advice and revelations had elements of the unconventional, the unforeseen, the sudden, that reached the bounds of the incredible. I was once talking to him about a person who had been sent a very important letter from a friend, about some concern they both had. I knew about the matter, but I did not know if the letter had reached its destination. At some point I heard him whispering, “Yes, I see, he’s got the letter” Then he turned to me and said, “Tell me, what does “eneos” (ἐνεός) mean?” I was puzzled by his irrelevant question, but I replied, “From what I remember, Elder, it means wonder-struck, dumbfounded, speechless. Then the Elder said, “Yes, like that, he was speechless as soon as he read the letter.”

“Elder, “I said in amazement, “you mentioned the word “eneos” without knowing what it meant?” Then the Elder said, “Yes, I didn’t know what the word “eneos” meant, but I said it because that’s what came into my mouth.” When I returned to Athens, I phoned the sender of the letter. He told me that his

friend had received it, and that was speechless when he read the contents. However, I was more speechless or “eneos” than all of them, because of the Elder’s improbable information. He not only “saw” the letter being received, but he also perceived the recipient’s surprise and articulated it with a very effective word, without knowing what its definition was.

### *What Does “ἤρα” Mean?*

On another day, he asked me about my prayers and I recited the 142nd Psalm of David to him according to the Septuagint. When I arrived at the point that says, “Cause me to know the way in which I should walk, for I lift up my soul to You.” The Elder stopped me, to ask about one of the ancient Greek words. “Tell me, what does “ἤρα» (lift up) mean?” I replied, “It means “I got up, I lifted up.” Then I asked, “Did you not know what the word “ἤρα» meant?” Then he said, quite simply, “I don’t know what it means, but do you know how I feel that word?” Then he made the most spiritual analysis of the meaning of the resurrection of the soul towards God. Being almost unlettered the Elder did not know the definition of the word “ἤρα» however he knew its deeper spiritual meaning amazingly well. “You are Great, O Lord” I said to myself. I continued reciting the psalm to him. I stressed certain words because they put my soul at ease, following an unjust reproach made against me. Specifically, “For your righteousness’ sake bring my soul out of trouble, in Your mercy destroy my enemies and wipe out all those who afflict my soul, for I am Your servant.” Immediately, the Elder, “testing the hearts and kidneys” (Ps. 7:9) intervened, saying, “Stop, stop, when you say “destroy my enemies and wipe out all those who afflict my soul, do not think of people, but demons. Face every situation with the love of the New Testament.” The Elder’s sensitive and Orthodox spiritual receiver “picked up” my most subtle reflections and when they swerved he made the necessary corrective intervention. Of course, I had not thought at that moment of “destroying” or “wiping out” those who reproached me, but simply for God’s righteousness to prevail, in order to correct the injustice done. However, he did not even allow that sort of swerve. He also reminded me of something else, that as he had once taught me, the people in question were my brothers, who had fallen victim to the robber demons. Moreover, that I should turn my efforts against those real enemies, loving my fellow man in all situations, as Christ revealed in the New Testament.

### *God Does Not Punish*

The Elder lived out the love of the New Testament, and evaluated everything using this love as a criterion. I once talked to him about the moral crisis of our age. A crisis which, with the amazing audio-visual means of telecommunication, has taken on the form of a worldwide epidemic. There has been nothing like it in history in terms of expanse and depth. The Elder agreed sadly, and did not speak. However, as soon as I told him that I was afraid that God might allow harsher punishment, so that we would be brought to our senses, he replied with the words, “No, God does not punish; man punishes himself, by withdrawing from God. It’s, let us say: Here water, there fire. I am free to choose. I put my hand in the water and I’m refreshed; I put it in the fire and I’m burnt.”

### *God’s Intervention is in Secret*

The next time we met, I returned to the subject. I mentioned a quote from one of the homilies of St. John Chrysostom. It says that God wants the drastic chastisement of the sinful person, for his correction and salvation. However, since He has so much love and hurts more than the person being chastised does, He encourages the intercession of the saints, living and departed. This results in some measure being brought to the harshness of the chastisement. The Elder listened with pleasure. Then I asked him, “Elder, does God intervene in our life?” He replied, “No, He does not intervene; He respects our freedom.” Then, in a low voice, he added, “God’s intervention is in secret.” I felt that his words progressed into the mysteries of God. Leaving his cell, I thought to myself, “God’s intervention is in secret, therefore unknown to us. That’s why it is dangerous to link certain sins of some people with certain unpleasant events that happen to them, and to consider those events as obvious intervention and punishment from God, as though they were God given judgements and disasters.”

The will of God is unsearchable. “Who has known the mind of the Lord,” apart from the Lord Himself and His saints, to the degree that He reveals it to them.

What became learnt was that “God is Love” and therefore His secret interventions take place out of love. His Love respects our freedom.

### *God Respects the Devil’s Freedom*

When I met him a few days later, the Elder advanced even further. He told me, “The devil is a personality, and that is why God respects his freedom.” I had never imagined that. The idea that God could respect the freedom of the angels who do not sin, that He could respect the freedom of human beings who sin and



who do not sin, that He could respect the freedom of human beings, who sin and repent, was comprehensible. However, the thought that he could respect the freedom of the disrespectful demons, who sin and do not repent was incomprehensible to me. To what point did God's love respect the freedom of his rational creatures? Perhaps there is no limitation point. Yet, how does his secret intervention take place according to the Elder's assurance? A mystery, hence secret. Since it is a mystery, it is better to simply accept that it happens rather than making vain attempts to investigate, curiously, how it happens. It is enough to know that it happens out of love.

### *God Respects Our Will*

The discretion of God's love, as the Elder revealed it to us, is quite moving. We were a friendly company at Kallisia, by the monastery rocks, with the Elder amongst us. It was night-time, the eve of the feast of the Holy Spirit. The Elder made a touching, devout, external and internal, description of the Athonite vigils at Kavsokalyvia, when, as he said, "the Holy Spirit came and flooded the monks' souls with heavenly joy." Saying this he gave us a wake-up call, "Even now the Holy Spirit wants to enter our souls, like It did then, but It respects our freedom; It does not want to violate it. It waits for us to open the door on our own, and then It will enter our soul and transfigure it." His words reminded me of Revelations, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and dine with him, and He with Me" (Rev. 3:20) Almighty God discreetly knocks at the door of frail man and waits patiently for him to open it for Him. This, so that He can make him truly fortunate. Yet, man frequently misuses the freedom that God has granted him. He does not open up for Him, and remains closed within his misery. How many of us, I wonder, have the good sense to put into practice the supplication, "Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, come and abide in us"? How many of us, while saying that pray are not barred in with the loneliness of our own insecurity? God respects our foolishness because that is also an expression of our freedom. One day the Elder said to me, "God respects our will". Another day he said, "Whatever you do, do it because you want to, freely, responsibly and with pleasure." I tried to go deep into that concise, but comprehensive advice of his.

### *Obedience Out of Egotism*

I discussed a related matter with him. It was about a certain "strict" spiritual father. He had refused to satisfy the desire of one of his spiritual children, who wanted to visit Elder Porphvrios to talk about a serious personal matter. The

incident had left a painful impression on me and I articulated it. The Elder shook his head sadly and whispered, "What can you say? He is, you see, also a spiritual father." The Elder was always careful and lenient in his opinions of others, especially when it concerned priests who made mistakes. Rather than making characterisations he preferred to speak in parables, "You know when a Papal missionary gets an order for some mission, he gets on the plane at Rome. When the plane arrives at the airport of an African state he opens a sealed envelope and reads what his task will be. He is obliged to carry it out, even if he does not agree. It does not happen like that with us Orthodox." I understood what he, more-or-less, wanted to tell me. Besides, it was not the first time that I had discovered that there are also some spiritual guides in Orthodoxy, fortunately only a few, who are essentially inspired by a Papal spirit. They demand that their orders are carried out, quite indifferent to the inner resistance of their spiritual children. They cultivate a whole way of thinking. They impose disciplinary authority, since they are afraid of freedom and they are ignorant of the fact that Orthodox obedience is the fruit of freedom. It was not long before the dictatorial discipline bore results: The same spiritual child of the "strict" father informed the friends that urged him to see Fr. Porphyrios, that he no longer wanted to see him. On a visit to the Elder I said to him, "I think that he doesn't come to see you, not because he doesn't want to come, but because he is being obedient to his spiritual father. The Elder surprised me, by saying to me, "He is being obedient, because his spiritual father's advice indulges his ego." It was the first time I had ever heard the Elder speak to me so openly about spiritual mistakes. I knew that he did not do it out of personal susceptibility. The Elder did not invite people to visit him. (I only noted one exception to this, and this was only after the fervent pleadings from the friends of a prejudiced man, who was troubled. In essence, it was their own indirect invitation). The Elder did not want fans. He simply helped everyone who hurried to his cell. Perhaps he spoke to me like that because he wanted to reveal another trick of the devil amongst the Christian ranks. I thought to myself, "Well then, the motivation for that man's obedience was the indulgence of his ego."

### *Unruffled by the Enemy's Efforts*

My discoveries were unpleasant and looking at the Elder's calm spiritual stance, I envied him. He was unruffled, even though the incident did not concern me, but him, because it was him that they misunderstood. The Elder never converted an unjust attack into a personal quarrel with those who criticised him. He told the truth without "fear and passion" but with courage and divine

dispassion. This, since he knew that the spiritual contest does not occur between men, but between love and hate, Christian sanctity “against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” In each case, he remained the peaceful, soft-spoken father, lenient and tolerant with people’s faults, because he possessed the secrets of the spiritual struggle. He was not trapped by the deceptive manipulations of the devil, who, as the first taught, with updated changes, put into practice, the method of “divide and rule”. The Elder did not take sides. He did not separate himself from sinners. He felt himself to be organically united with all Christians, within the united body of the Church. He lived out the Apostle’s saying, “Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?” (2 Cor 11:29). As much as he despised sin, so much more so did he love all sinners without distinction. Sometimes they fought against him, egged on by the devil, and he tried to ally himself with them in the common war of Christians against evil. He followed St. John Chrysostom’s advice, “Do not stand with him (the devil) against others, rather line up with others against him.”

### *When Christ Comes, Sin Leaves*

One day he said to me, “When Christ comes and dwells throughout the soul, then all problems leave, all delusions, all distress. Then sin leaves.” I asked, questioning, “How does sin leave Elder, since Scripture says that even if we only live on the earth for only one day we would still sin?” The Elder looked at me sadly and said, “What can I tell you, since you don’t understand me?” I tried to understand him. When I arrived home, I studied about the matter within Holy Scripture. I saw that my question was justified in the Old Testament, in the words of Job, “Who is free from uncleanness? But no-one, even if his life on earth is only one day” (Job 14:4 LXX<sup>[u]</sup>) I also found the Elder’s answer, established in the first epistle of his beloved, St. John the Evangelist, “And you know that he was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin. Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him or known Him.” So, I transferred my question from Fr. Porphyrios to St. John. It was clear that I was acting in vain, because I was trying intellectually to conceive of truths that are only understood by life experience. St. John the Evangelist, and Fr. Porphyrios, with their experience of the Holy Spirit, spoke the same language.

### *Divine Transfiguration*

Another day, the Elder, condescending to my weakness, wanted to help me with my query. He said, "When the Holy Spirit visits us, we realise it. We are in no doubt at all. It is not like one of our usual emotions. It is something that comes from above and transfigures us completely; it makes us other people. That's why we called our monastery, the Transfiguration of the Saviour. When Christ enters us we then live all that is good, love for all the world. Evil, sin, hatred, disappear on their own. They cannot stay; there is no room for them to stay." I felt that the Elder was not talking about some piecemeal attempt on our part, but about a decisive, definite transition from the old life of sin to the new life of holiness, according to which, we live in Christ and Christ lives in us. Moreover, in order to achieve that transition we needed to give over all our strength. He once asked me, "Tell me, how many years does it take for someone to study to be a lawyer?" I replied. He asked again, "How many years does it take for someone to study to be an engineer, a chemist, a doctor?" I then answered accordingly, wondering about the nature of his questions. The Elder concluded, "How many years do we devote to studying in order to learn God's will and to put it into practice?" I understood what he meant and I was ashamed to answer him. What could I tell him? That most of us believers are indolent, lukewarm "amateur Christians"? He knew that, and he told me so. "One does not become a Christian through laziness, it needs work, hard work." He himself was an example of this, without self-promotion. He had devoted all the years of his long life in studying and living out Christ. He was very hard-working, both in body and soul, and he wanted to pass on this love of work to others. He believed that idleness leads to listlessness and this then leads to many sicknesses of both body and soul. He advised work therapy. Especially to all those who had become disorganised and were in despair. For the Elder it was never too late for a fresh start. Indeed, he considered that having worldly hopes proved false and the crushing of the ego to be the best presupposition for that start.

### *Martha and Mary*

The Elder did not only value work, but he also knew about putting it in the right order. One afternoon, I was amongst a group of ten or so pilgrims and the Elder was talking to us as a whole, out in the open air. He talked to us about work. At some point he asked, "Tell me, why does Christ praise Mary in the Gospel and not Martha? Was it because Mary was lazy?" We were surprised by the question and no-one answered. The Elder continued, No, Mary was not lazy. Mary was also a Martha. She was hard working, like Martha, but she had something more significant than Martha did: She knew how to put her jobs in the

right order, the spiritual ones before the material ones. She knew that it was a great mistake to occupy ourselves with material concerns when Christ is talking to us. There was a suitable time for those jobs too. However, the first job, for that hour was listening to the words of the Lord, which would also give value to the work of material service that would follow.” On the way back, I thought about those words of the Elder that revealed realities that were not visible at first sight. It was not only the worldly people who turned their back on Christ, in order to manage to “buy a field” (Matt. 13:44). Religious people who hurried to meet Him did not listen to Him, and could not serve Him. Quite a few believers with good intentions were caught in the net of excessive external action, and, with the self-satisfaction of those who “imagine that they are made righteous by works”<sup>[2]</sup> but do not listen and do not understand Christ. Not only that, but they protest against those who devote their time to prayer. How can they be convinced that they are in danger of becoming like the Pharisee, who counted out to God his good works, but was ignorant of his arrogance? That good works on their own, without a humble learning spirit, become a strong alibi that hides their proud spirit away? That many of those who ascetically minded people who live in “ivory-towers” work in secret, and despite that consider themselves to be “an indebted servant”, who humbly seek out the mercy of Christ’s love? And that, prayer is not one job amongst many, but it is the work, “the one thing that is needed” (Lk. 10: 42)? And that it is not just a means, but it is the goal of life, “the good part” (Lk. 10:42), the acquisition of the Holy Spirit.

### *The Elder’s Love*

The Elder, who worked harder than Martha, was much like Mary, because “sitting at Jesus’ feet” he talked with Him continually. That is why he was a dwelling- place for the Holy Spirit and it was noticeable from the rich fruit it bore. The first fruit was his love. A love that was true, unaffected, without preconditions, full of affection, stronger than death, wider and deeper than the ocean, that embraced each person without distinction; it embraced the whole world. It was Christ’s love as described by St. Paul in his hymn of love (1 Cor 13). By the grace of Christ, the Elder spoke the “tongues of men and of angels”. He had prophecy and nearly knew “all mysteries”. He possessed “all knowledge and all faith, so that he could remove mountains”. He “gave all that he possessed to the poor” and “gave his body to be burned” in the fire of his various, life long, trials. Moreover, he did all these things “having love”. His love was generous, benevolent. It was not envious. It was not conceited. It was not proud. It did not behave rudely. It was not selfish, did not get angry and did not remember

wrongs, did not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoiced in the truth. It covered up everything. It had good faith about everything. It hoped for the good in everything. It endured all things. His love never declined, but always stood upright, in order to be raised, in the end, from earth to heaven, where it beheld the Eternal Love “face to face”.

### *The Other Fruits of the Spirit*

Apart from his love, the other fruits of the Holy Spirit that dwelt within him were obvious. There was his combined crucifixional and resurrectional joy, which blossomed like edelweiss, even through the iciest storms of his life. He also passed this on to every sorrowful visitor of his. His peace, despite all the external commotion that surrounded him, reigned untroubled within him. It attracted thousands of souls who came to him to find peace. His long-suffering, like a wounded pelican<sup>[3]</sup>, covered his spiritual children with care and affection, even though they pecked at him demandingly. There was his good disposition, which was always well-intentioned and unarmed even the most suspicious visitor. His kindness, that open-handedly extended rich gifts to all, both material and spiritual ones. His steadfast faith in Christ and his flawless credibility and consistency, both in words and action. There was his gentleness, even during the most irritating and persistent annoyances. His ascetic continence, even to the most innocent demands of his body and soul.

The presence of the Holy Spirit in his life became apparent because he continually filled us with wonder as we saw it calmly flow, “in much affliction with joy of the Holy Spirit” (1 Thess. 1: 6). If he were to have articulated his life experience he could have used the words of St. Paul, “Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake” (2 Cor. 12:10)

The Elder’s holiness did not flutter amongst the rosy clouds of dreams, but walked on the hard earth of trials and afflictions. That is why it was very real and convincing. He convinced those in doubt. He reproved those who were not repentant. He taught the well-intentioned. He was a great benefit to all. The Elder loved the saints very much. He shared in their life of the spirit. He fitted in with them. He was their friend. He understood them and they understood him. They inspired him and gave him rest.

He was not jealous of any good thing he saw in others. On the contrary, he was glad about it, as though it was something he had. Saints are not jealous, but share in good things, that they consider to be “common property”, a gift from God to the uniform body of the Church.

The Elder, although aged, had no trouble bearing down to a young man who

The Elder, although aged, had no trouble bowing down to a young man who had reached holiness. This, because holiness has no age. It has God's age; it is eternal.

The Elder was very smart, but not at all devious. He was not "clever" in a worldly sense. He did not have that kind of cleverness, which equates with craftiness and deceit. He had the sobriety of saints, which equates with "wisdom according to God". This knows how to prefer pearls rather than chaff. The devil is crafty, but not clever. He is stupid like every stupid follower of his, with his stupid choices.

The Elder was always rational, often beyond reason, even sometimes irrational. He often transcended reason, without ever going below it. The Elder's intelligence was an oasis of human self-respect. Certain rationalists, who heard accounts of the Elder's views said, "But any reasonable person could say that." Certainly they could, but with the difference that the views of a reasonable person could be refuted by later events that are beyond reason. Whereas, the Elder's views would be confirmed by such events.

You could always notice the sense of measure in the Elder. You even noticed the most careful, orthodox, balanced journey, which turned neither to the devil's temptations on the left or to those on the right. In his life you understood the meaning of the phrase, "to be Orthodox is always to walk on a tight-rope".

### *Hidden Virtue*

The Elder, overladen with spiritual fruits, made sure that he hid them, rather than exhibit them. His words were plain, modest, and hesitant, so that you often undervalued them and did not consider them worthy of any special attention. He applied the patristic notion of "hiding away your virtue". Therefore, if you didn't practice humility you were in danger of not realising what priceless value he hid within himself. You would also lose unrepeatable opportunities for spiritual benefit.

Unfortunately, most of the time we went to see him unprepared, that is, with pride. Even if it was a "devout" pride, delicate, refined, hidden under our supposedly humble words and actions.

### *Poor Appearance, Hidden Riches*

The Elder's apparent image was in complete contrast to his hidden one. On the outside, you saw a usual, weak, unlettered, unimportant little old man. However, with a little intuition, you realized that you were faced with an unusual, all-powerful, wise and important man of God. He systematically hid his

...and power, was and important man of our day, systematically and his bright personality so that the devil would not blacken it with proud thoughts. The Elder did not boast about himself. He did not brag about his life, even if that was a triumph of heroic self-denial. Even when he emerged from his long years of obscurity, as hundreds of people discovered him, and converged to get his advice he did not change. Even then, he kept to the spiritual hiding place of his humility.

If he was a secular person, he would have felt very lonely. He would have had no companions at all on his spiritual flights. But, because he was a Christian saint, he did not feel -alone, because he could be with his beloved Christ, as well as all the saints. He had great humility, and rendered all his gifts wholly back to God. He also had great love, coming down and embracing every fallen sinner.

### *Wise Discretion*

He had much subtle discretion. He knew when to be silent or to speak, and for how long. He knew what to say and what to do in each and every situation. He could make clear distinctions and could distinguish the actions of God from those of the devil. In this way, he was able to dissolve demonic confusion. Confusion, that the demons sowed systematically in order to trap unsuspecting souls into delusion or heresy.

### *Taught by God*

He had not studied “the wisdom of the world”. He had not even completed elementary school, so he could not even rely on that. He had not composed theories of his own invention about life and the world. When people asked him about their problems he would in turn pray and appeal to God for help. He unfolded his soul before Him, like a clean, blank sheet of paper, so that He could write His message upon it. Then the Elder would spell it out, humbly. He was right when he said he did not know how to speak, when he said that he did not know anything. He was not self-enlightened, self-taught, independent. He was enlightened from elsewhere, taught by God, and dependant upon Him. He offered himself to God with unconditional love, without hesitation, without holding back because of selfish passions. God responded to his self-offering by covering him wholly in His love and making him a choice instrument of His. This, so that everyone who had the good fortune to get to know him would whisper from time to time, “God is wondrous in His saints”. In the Elder’s life the man shrunk so that God could be developed within him. So that he could say, like St. John the Baptist, “he must increase, but I must decrease” (Jn. 3:30).



## *He Received Everybody*

People of various religions and ideological tendencies visited the Elder. The heterodox: followers of the Pope and Protestants, those of other religions: Muslims, Buddhists and idol-worshippers, atheists, materialist, humanists, rationalists, sceptics, Nitzscheans, Marxists, Freudians, nihilists, anarchists, masons, Millennialists and many others. He touched the soul of each and offered them all an acceptable, edifying word. He found some way of his own that would set each one thinking and make them wake up. Especially heterodox heretics, and those in delusion. Even more so, those of the same confession who lived in a climate of Orthodoxy in words only and deviate from the way of Orthodoxy in action. Instead walking along the byways of extreme tendencies. With the Elder, the visitor felt the warmth of remorseful delight. It flowed clearly from his balanced spirituality, which was founded on his humble love in Christ and his responsible freedom.

## *He Respected All*

The Elder respected the uniqueness of the other's personality, because he was an "image of the ineffable glory of God, even though bearing scars of the falls". He accepted the other person as he was, even if was disfigured by sin. He did not attempt to change him forcefully and violently, but prayed in secret so that the other person would want to change, by loving Christ. Even though he was so high up, seeing us crawl so low down, he did not steam roll our characters. He did not want to flatten us and turn us into copies of himself. He respected our freedom, even when we made bad choices; he hoped that they would become better, but of our own accord. He had all the freedom to foresee our future, to amaze us with his gifts, to influence us most deeply and to put us on the road that he wanted to put us on. Yet, he did not do that, preferring that we chose our own way, freely and responsibly. He desired that we would rise up high, so that we could approach him and he could share the rich gifts that divine Grace offered him. He saw that we also wanted to be found up there with him. Yet, we wanted this without working hard. We wanted it easily and comfortably, as if by magic. He was very sad about that, although he never mentioned it outright. He would leave us at the level we were to be found at, until we realised and freely chose to set off on the upward path by ourselves. He revealed that truth to us indirectly.

## *I'm Neither a Magician nor a Prophet*

One day he said to me, “I’m not a magician. I’m not a prophet. I don’t say that I saw the Mother of God, or that a war will take place. I am a great sinner and I pray to Christ humbly for Him to have mercy upon me.” His last phrase was the greatest miracle of his life. We, however, did not see it. It was with that miracle that he went up the stairway of holiness, step by step. He was made worthy of hearing Christ’s words: “You are my friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I call you friends, for all things that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you” (Jn 15:14-15). The result of the perfection of his love became known to more and more people who converged upon his monastery.

### *Missionary From an Ascetic’s Cell*

Thus, the Elder accomplished the miraculous phenomenon of Orthodox saints, “missionary work in reverse”. Somebody once wrote that, “The Orthodox ascetic does not go out to save the world, but secretly calls on God for Him to save the world.” The Elder did not go out into the world to preach. He hid himself away from the world, so that he could devote himself to worshipping God, without distraction. In turn, God made him a dwelling-place of His gifts. It was sufficient that these should become known to only a few, so that they would then be spread abroad to many. This happened despite the fact that he had forbidden it.

The Elder did not rule out preaching and Christian social work. On the contrary, he fervently advised it, since Christ told his disciples to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19) Just like any proper, unbiased, Christian social worker does not rule out the way of ascetic retreat. This is because it has grown up and born fruit within the history of the Orthodox Church. The Elder did not rule out any of the many ways to sanctification and salvation. He helped each person, effectively, choose what suited him or her best.

### *Fullness, Thoroughness, the Middle Way*

With God’s Grace, he became a complete spiritual guide. Some spiritual fathers, according to their character and tendencies, addressed themselves more to their spiritual children’s intelligence, others to their emotions and others to their will. The Elder addressed himself to, and satisfied, all three elements of the human soul “globally”. He addressed more than just that. Something much deeper, something substantial and inexpressible, something that is “not of this world”.

Whatever he did, he did it in a proper manner, because he knew that, “good is not good if it is not done well”. He was thorough in everything. He was an

effective worker of love, without ever becoming a pedant, or a stickler for the law. When he celebrated the mysteries, when he gave advice, when he listened, when he drank water, when he ate his bare meals, when he lit up his self styled heater, when he mended things, when he walked amongst the trees, whenever he did anything whatsoever, even the most insignificant thing, he breathed out the fragrance of his noble humility, of harmony, of pleasure, of deep and secret joy, of contrite devotion, of holiness.

He walked along the correct, middle way of the Fathers. He kept far away from extremities and contradictions. He was not an indiscriminate zealot. Neither was he a secular moderniser. He ruled out both anti- Orthodox extremes with the same intensity, and prayed for those trapped within them. He was Orthodox in the true, untwisted, sense of the word.

### *A True Helper*

He was the comforting supporter of every soul that had been shattered by sin. Souls that sought refuge in the harbour of his cell. He was constantly prepared, not only to give emotional comfort, but also to sacrifice himself, for each person in pain and distress. His help was not casual and superficial; it was profound and substantial. He knew that sorrow is not the result of accidents or oppression from some “bad fate”. He knew that nothing in our life is by chance. With his vivid teachings, he made us realize that “our sorrows are due to the absence of Christ in the depths of our soul, to demonic actions, and to our sins.” They are due to, “our wounded ego” from our bad deeds, that are not momentary, involuntary, external results of unfavourable circumstances or us having a “bad moment”. They are the fruit of a way of life and our long years of voluntary, internal consent to evil desires. Our evil deeds are hatched there, in the unseen depths of our soul. Even if they are blocked from being displayed on the outside, they have already been realised within. During His Sermon on the Mount, Christ revealed the internal root of our external sins. If they are not cut off from there, they will defile us completely.

### *Genuinely Humble and Prepared*

The Elder was more than prepared at the time of his departure, because at every opportunity of love that the Lord gave him, throughout the eighty-six years of his life he said a corresponding ‘yes’. Therefore, at the end of his earthly road, that ‘yes’ “multiplied like the sand of the sea”. The self-sacrifice of his love gave you a dim comparative measure of the immeasurable love of Christ. It was love for each one of us and it gave you a measure of your gratitude

Christ. It was love for each one of us and it gave you a measure of your gratitude towards him. He approached with this love of his. From this love, he recognised his sinfulness, because he compared it with the sinlessness of Him. The most profound self-knowledge flowed from this comparison and from his unaffected humility.

### *Serious and Cheerful*

The Elder was serious and at the same time cheerful. He could combine and attune elements of character that are usually opposed within the world. When he was serious, he was not at all cold, grim, or depressing in his behaviour. Likewise, when he was cheerful he was not fickle, trivial, or inconsiderate. When you were with him you felt both respectful and euphoric, both the joy of salvation and the sorrow of repentance, true joyful-sorrow.

### *Full of Humanity*

Because he loved Christ very much he loved fellow men and women very much too. For this reason he breathed out deep humanity, not the ideologically humanistic sense of the Franks<sup>[4]</sup>, but in the traditional Greek Orthodox sense. The Elder was able to live out a high state of holiness, within a natural, unforced and free humane climate of personal friendship and generosity of spirit.

### *Fearless*

Despite being weak, the Elder was fearless. Because he loved Christ, he did not know what fear meant, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love" (1 Jn. 4:18). He could say, together with the ascetics of the desert, "I am not afraid of God, because I love Him." He was never frightened by the criminal evil of people, the ferocity of beasts, the pain of sickness, the weariness of old age, the threat of death, or any other frightening thing. This was because he had entrusted himself completely to the love of Almighty God, and because he himself loved everybody and everything. He walked securely like a "sheep amongst wolves," because, in Christ, he was able to love the wolves. His love disarmed every single enemy. They felt their enmity give way before the peaceful power of brotherhood in Christ.

### *Full Knowledge in Both Body and Soul*

One day he said to me, “The neo-Nicolaitan<sup>[5]</sup> tendencies that have appeared in our age spring from the heresy of gnosticism.” The Elder had not studied at a school-desk, but knew Church history in full. In his teaching and in his life you saw the things of the body in complete harmony with the things of the soul: The material with the spiritual, all sanctified through the grace of the Holy Spirit. The Elder loved the whole man, as an unbroken psychosomatic unity. He helped him become holy as just such a unity of body and soul. He knew of the direct interdependence of body and soul, he knew about the “endemic” psychosomatic illness of man. He knew its cause, that originates from our sinful passions and he worked hard for his cure, like an excellent psychiatrist. Of course, not a psychiatrist in the scientific sense of the word, but a psychiatrist in the original sense, a doctor of the soul. In this sense, the Elder was a true and incomparable psychiatrist, psychologist, psychoanalyst, and psychotherapist<sup>[6]</sup>. I have his personal testimony on the matter. We were once discussing the difficult psychological problems that people brought to him. At some point, I heard him saying with his indisputable humility, “You know, when people go to different doctors and still are not cured, they finally say, “Now, let’s go to the university professor”.” The Elder really was a professor regarding knowledge and cure of the soul. He did not work on the surface but in depth. In depth psychology, that is enigmatically unapproachable for secular people, was an understandable and approachable reality. Perhaps his greatest offering to his visitors was making them consciously aware of their unconscious passions. Thus, leading them to deep repentance.

As is well-known, the Church prays for the forgiveness of “voluntary and involuntary sins, known and unknown.” What is not at all well known is the influence that sins have on each other. How much does indifference to facing our voluntary sins, done in knowledge, increases and strengthens, almost inevitably, involuntary ones done in ignorance? These latter sins are certainly active in the depths of the unconscious, and because of this are unseen. The Elder with his self-knowledge and knowledge of others could bring buried traumatic experience from unknown passions of the soul to the surface of the conscience. These, like “dragons of the deep” and “underground troglodytes”, agitated the calm surface and the “festive cultured upper storey”. The visitor suffered from these stirrings without knowing what was to blame. The Elder revealed the cause to them and prescribed a cure.

Centuries before our meagre psychological modern discoveries Holy Scripture revealed, “The heart is deep above all things, and so is man. Who can know it?” (Jer 17:9 LXX). The “deep heart”<sup>[7]</sup>, the depths of the soul, does not have boundaries. This profound nature of the soul is man’s essential hypostasis. Who

can know these abysmal depths, apart from their Creator, God Himself, and His saints, to whom He gave similar capabilities for knowing the soul? Fr. Porphyrios was one of those saints.

### *Diagnosis Contrasting Sentimental Words with Real Emotions*

One afternoon, I visited him together with somebody I knew. He received us both in his cell together.

During our conversation, the other person, amongst other things, told him about the great esteem he had towards my person. The Elder looked at him. Then he bent his head down and did not say anything. We left a little later.

On my next visit, I was alone. The Elder said, “I was thinking about that person you know. The one you brought to see me here and cheerfully told me about the esteem he has for you. But at the very moment he said that, do you know what I saw in his soul: that he detests you and rejects you.” I was speechless following his revelation, something I could not even imagine. The Elder continued, “Be careful, though, because what I saw is in his subconscious. Do you understand? What is the subconscious?” I told him what I knew about it. He added, “Because it is in his subconscious he does not know about it. Listen to what I am telling you carefully.” When I returned home, I was distressed and irritated about the divided and two-faced behaviour of that man. Seeing as he rejected me deep down, who made him approach me, and indeed, confess his esteem for me in front of the Elder? Wouldn’t it be more reasonable to leave me, so that he would be in harmony with whatever his deepest emotions were? Some hours of irritation went by, and it was only after some time that I started to comprehend the Elder’s caution, “Be careful, because it is in his subconscious and he does not even know about it.” Really, that person did consciously have a high opinion of me. He showed it, and felt that he was correct with regard to me. The problem of his self-contradiction was hidden in his subconscious and that is why he did not know about it. Establishing this, and thus justifying the Elder’s caution, calmed me down. I accepted him as he was and did not change my favourable stance towards him. I left things as they were before.

Later, when I went to the Elder again he explained it to me further, “What I saw in his subconscious was old a trauma. It is demonic.” When I asked if he could change by sanctification he answered, “Man changes with holiness, the wounds and traumas of the soul leave. Today psychiatrists call it a psychiatric disorder, in reality it is demonic action due to our sins.” I decided not to tell him anything about the Elder’s revelation in case I harmed him rather than helped him. Besides, what could I tell him? The roots were so deep that words could not

reach them. I contented myself with praying for him in secret. Only the Elder could give him a wake-up call, when the moment was right. This, so that he could become consciously aware of what was in his subconscious. I thought that I should not confine the problem to that man alone. We all, with the exception of the saints, have similar problems without knowing about them. Indifferent to erasing the wealth of sins done knowingly and voluntarily, we have piled up a similar wealth of sins, in the “locked cupboard” of our subconscious. These hidden sins, which were done involuntarily and in ignorance, act compulsively from the depths. Nobody knows to what point man, sinning without repenting, is play-acting at the expense of his conscious. Nor can one know from what point onwards, the impassioned subconscious is play-act- ing at the expense of the person. The words of Christ on the cross, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Lk. 23:34) could perhaps also hint at this truth. The actual and moral perpetrators of the crucifixion did not know what they were doing. Just like a drunkard does not know what he is doing when drunk. But when he is sober he knows that if succumbs, knowingly and willingly, to the temptation of alcohol, he will be dragged, in ignorance and unwillingly, to more serious misconduct. He will also be responsible for surrendering to temptation, because if he does not stop this surrendering it will lead to worse things. It will not just stop at becoming drunk on alcohol. He will soon become drunk on sin and from this, his subconscious will be intoxicated so that his conscious will no longer be aware of the evil it does. The crucifying Pharisees stood under the cross, “unscrupulously, calmly and happy” about their work. Besides, a few hours earlier they made sure that they were “pure”. That is why “they themselves did not go into the Praetorium, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the Passover”(Jn. 18:28). They were concerned about being defiled by the idolatrous Praetorium, but they were not concerned about the defilement of the God-slaughtering crucifixion. They saw the first defilement; they did not see the second one. Not only did they not see it, but they thought that with Christ’s crucifixion they “offered worship to God”.

### *Words of Parable*

Some of the Elder’s words were enigmatic, mainly because he often preferred to speak in parables. This was for his own reasons of pastoral judgement. Some of these words were later explained by the events that followed. Some, although years have passed, remain in the field of mystery. Perhaps they have already come true without us realising it. Perhaps they will come true in the life to come, when we will no longer “see in a mirror dimly” but “face to face”.

## *Silent Blessing*

On not a few occasions the Elder would receive pilgrims and give them his blessing without uttering a single word. Some people became overly sad about this and felt almost insulted. Although it was well known that the Elder had such refined discretion that he did not insult anybody, not even a small child. There was a reason for his silence. A reason known to him, yet unknown to his pilgrims. Whoever believed this left in peace, assured that they had received a silent blessing. This was a distinct blessing, because it was received by people who had the humility to accept everything from God, via the Elder, with gratitude. They were even ready to accept whatever seemed to be unpleasant, without grumbling, without asking why, without wanting to satisfy their own curiosity.

## *Analytical Explanations*

Contrarily, there were times when the Elder was very talkative and indeed made revelations to the pilgrims. It is an inexplicable mystery how with God's grace he discerned and evaluated the innermost and deepest stirrings of each person's soul. Stirrings that were unknown to the person in question. He would, to some degree, open the door of revelation and ascent to each one accordingly. Once, as an exception, he talked to me openly about God's gift to him, the ability to "see" what was not naturally visible. I asked him, at the time, how that amazing phenomenon worked. The Elder answered, "I am unable to tell you how it happens."

## *Sympathy and Help*

The Elder did not restrict himself to giving advice "from on high". Instead, he was crucified together with people's problems and went down into the Hades of their sinful passions together with them. This, so that he could liberate them from these passions and so he could humbly preach the resurrection of their souls. Without becoming like them, he suffered with them. This paternal sympathy often reached the bounds of self-sacrifice. There were many cases where the Elder agreed to carry out the personal, laborious, and responsible affairs of life for afflicted and defenceless people. He found time to do this despite the wealth of visitors, phone calls, responsibilities for the monastery, and the problems caused by his sicknesses, that suffocatingly surrounded him. These manifold expressions of his spontaneous self-sacrifice and personal love shook



even the coldest most self-centred egotist.

### *Circumspect and Prudent*

He was always prudent. In all the years that I knew him I never heard a empty word or saw a careless act. Everything was measured, weighed out, balanced. Most importantly of all, it was all natural and unforced, without a trace of affectation. His prudence, like the crystal waters of a mountain spring flowed calmly from the gift of discretion hidden in his soul.

### *Unprejudiced*

He was unprejudiced, in imitation of God. Despite the fact that there were visitors who tired or saddened him, and others who put him at ease or made him glad he did not make distinctions between them. He did not disregard the former and favour the latter. He was fair to all. He loved everyone equally. Perhaps those who tired him out a little more so, because they had a greater need for love. Sometimes, because tiredness and sickness he was obliged to break off his audiences. However, when he “saw”, with his discerning look, that some poor soul had an immediate need for support due to a truly serious problem, he received them as an exception. He did this, even if it was harmful to his health. When this happened there were usually some grumbling complaints from passing visitors, who saw things externally and with suspicion. The Elder realised this and was saddened. However, he preferred to be the target of unfair criticism rather than abandon his wounded neighbour, leaving him without help. He always acted like a good Samaritan and was never like a heartless Levite.

### *Educator*

His skill as an educator was unequalled. He was not authoritarian and domineering. He did not invite personal dependence, attachments and idolisation, which often end up in revolts for independence. He was not timid and abashed, causing insecurity, fears and anxiety. He was not self-centred, and he did not have its accompanying peculiarities, high-handedness and weaknesses. The Elder did not cultivate personal idolatry in the form of “elder worship”. He did not attempt to join his multifarious visitors to his person. He did not want to form a “personal faction”. He did not want to gain “fans”. On the contrary, he was centred on God. He himself lived in Christ. Consequently, he tried, with discreet zeal, to join those human souls wholly to Christ. He wanted to lead these souls like brides towards the Heavenly Bridegroom while he

to lead these souls like brides towards the heavenly Bridegroom, while he himself stayed on the sideline, in the shadows. He knew that this is the only way that salvation is guaranteed.

### *Simple and Profound*

He was simple and profound. This in direct contradiction to many, even teachers, who are twisted and shallow. He revealed the most profound truths about man and the world. This was in such a simple and natural way that you often did not give them much importance. So, rare opportunities to make these revelations your own would drop out of your hands. We were immersed in the spirit of secular intellectuals, who ordinarily presented their supposedly wise speculations to us, with a thudding semblance of importance. With the modest, unpretentious and humble Elder the visitor was in danger, at each moment, of becoming entrapped in his own pride. This pride would become an obstacle to approaching his sanctified way of life.

### *Frugal Meals*

Even the Elder's most material actions gave off the fragrance of spirituality. One day, upon entering his cell,

I found him eating his dinner while sitting on his bed. He blessed me and told me to sit down, without breaking off his meal. His familiarity made me glad. I sat on a chair opposite him and watched him in silence. It was an enjoyable sight. He held a bowl of vegetable soup in his left hand, over his lap. In his right hand, he held the spoon. He ate bent over, in silence, with great care, with humility, with gratitude, as though he was participation in a mysterious rite. At that moment, I wanted to have a video-camera to film the scene and then show it to friends as an original spiritual spectacle. It would be without words and would bear the title, "A saint eating his frugal meal." Looking at it, we would have been filled with delight. We would repeat the words of the monk who visited a great hermit and said, "It is enough for me to see you, Elder."<sup>[8]</sup> We would secretly experience St. Paul's words, "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). We would have instinctively compared that incomparable image with the image of our own dining-table, which is usually adorned with good food.

However, the Elder often made suggestions and gave instructions, even recipes, for delicious food and pastries. He clearly showed that he did not want us to be miserable and indifferent towards all the wonderful things that God has offered us out of his love.

## *Attention, Vigilance and Prayer*

The Elder lived in continual spiritual vigilance and prayer. While praying he paid attention to himself, the person speaking with him ... he paid attention to everything. Sometimes, while I was talking to him, I saw that he was sick, his eyes were closed and he shook his head a little (as though he had some sign of Parkinson's disease). He was bent over in his bed, deep in prayer. I asked myself, "I wonder, is the Elder really listening to what I'm telling him or is he simply silent and giving me the impression that he agrees with me?" He surprised me however, because as soon as I made a mistake in my thinking or I told him something that was inaccurate he corrected me immediately. He was like a sensitive spiritual computer that would flash little red lights at the slightest mistaken handling.

## *Voluntary Sleep*

He often stayed awake all night in prayer. He was also kept awake by the pain and discomfort of his sicknesses, which he transformed, by prayer, from involuntary, to voluntary pain and discomfort. Consequently, his weary body only needed a little sleep, at different times of day. Quite often I would enter his cell and see him napping. I then sat next to him, without making a sound, and enjoyed the spiritually moving scene. I thought to myself, "Look, a living, vigilant, saint, who is sleeping, because of physical weakness and sickness, yet "his heart is vigilant" in prayer." I would watch him for a short while. Sometimes he woke up, and chatted. At other times, he did not wake up, and I would leave, tapping the tips of his fingers to get his secret blessing. Yet, what really surprised and astonished me was when we started our conversation in the usual manner and when it reached the height of interest, he would close his eyes and fall soundly asleep. I was glad that he would get some rest by sleeping, but I did not know what to do. Should I stay or should I leave? I usually stayed for a short-while and then I would get up carefully and head for the exit. Sometimes, however, I would hear a voice behind me saying, "Hey, where are you going? Don't leave. Come! Let's finish off what we were saying. Man, I fell asleep, without realising it." I, however, had the impression that the Elder fell asleep and woke up when he wished.

## *Forgetfulness*

THE ELDER'S SPIRITUAL LIFE IN THE MONASTERY OF THE HOLY TRINITY

I had another surprise, when I realized that the Elder sometimes forgot things. I reminded him about things that he himself had told me, just a few days before. He would answer with most disarming directness: “Did I tell you those things? I don’t remember.” He was telling the truth. The Elder was never hypocritical. He never used the method that says, “the ends justifies the means”. Sometimes he decided that he should not tell you a certain thing, for spiritual reasons. Hence, he did not reveal all the truth, yet whatever he told you was true. Truly, he did not always remember what in other cases he remembered with the detail, and had told you about years before. I realised that the Elder as a human being was weak, however as an instrument of God he was amazing. The fact that he had an opinion about nearly all common and scientific matters, in spite of being almost illiterate, clearly shows that he was worthy to act as a chosen vessel of God, Who knows everything. It recalls the words of the Apostle, “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us” (2 Cor. 4:7). It recalls the prophets who said wonderful things when God spoke to them, yet when he did not speak to them they were unable to say anything. Therefore, when God allowed it, the Elder did not only forget, but he made mistakes too. This probably sounds like a scandal to some people. Nevertheless, it is not one. On the contrary, it confirms the spirit of Orthodoxy. In Orthodoxy, there is no infallible Pope, no superman. There is only the infallibility and authenticity of Christ and His Body, His uncreated Church. When God allowed the Elder to make a mistake, most rarely and as an exception, he allowed it for higher spiritual reasons, beneficial both to the Elder and to his visitors. The rule, however, was that the Elder did not make mistakes. This was for the simple reason that he did not speak from his human imagination, but from his experience of the Holy Spirit. The Elder knew this. One day, I hesitatingly mentioned the negative comments of some people about an opinion of his on a certain matter. The Elder took a lively interest and with great humility, he encouraged me to express myself freely. He said, “Tell me, what is their own opinion, so that I can check in case my own view is mistaken.” Then after a short silence he said, “but I don’t think so.”

### *Open, Unavoidable, Love*

The Elder became holy by loving. One day he said to me, “When we love Christ our sinful passions depart on their own. They lose their power when faced with the power of love. When day breaks and the sun lights up our room darkness leaves. It cannot stay.” Later he revealed even more. I had gone to visit him at Kallisia with a psychiatrist friend, but we did not find him there. He had left and hidden himself in the forest

left and hidden himself in the forest.

Empty-handed, we headed back, passing through the little forest, when, suddenly, by God's providence, we saw him, with a lawyer friend of his. He was coming across our path just as we were going up-hill in the other direction. I shouted out, "Your blessing, Elder!" He stopped and we approached him. We kissed his hand and I introduced my friend. He was glad to make his acquaintance and said, "Tell me, you psychiatrists, do you learn about the psychological condition called compulsion." My friend nodded in agreement. The Elder continued, "Just like in psychiatry you talk about certain people who are motivated by compulsion, the same thing happens with true Christians. Christ dwells in their soul and they can no longer do anything else but love all people, even their enemies. Just like the first martyr, Stephen, when his tormentors were stoning him, he loved them and called upon God not to punish them."

It was obvious that the Elder was speaking from his own experience. Where, even if he wanted to, he was unable to hate. He was unable to not love, because he had freely given up his will to the God of love. He had risen so high up on love's staircase, he had come so close to Stephen, the first martyr, and to the angels, that he had been transformed into an "earthly angel and a heavenly man". He could confirm for us, like St. Paul, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20)

His teaching and his life recall that monk who knew that God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 4:2), making the utmost use of his freedom to choose between either eternal death or salvation. He gave up his own will to the will of God, *carte blanche*, "freely, responsibly, and with thanksgiving" by praying, "Lord, whether I want it or not, save me". The Elder knew from experience that above and beyond all that is falsely called freedom there is true freedom. It is found in its absolute form in absolute obedience to the will of God, as confirmed by His Son, "Therefore, if the Son makes you free you shall be free indeed" (Jn. 8:36).

### *Joy of the Resurrection*

One day the Elder was talking to me in his cell about the great importance that the Lord's resurrection has for man. At some point I saw his face shine with joy as I heard him say, "Now tell me, so that I can hear it, the resurrection hymn, "O Pascha, the great and most sacred, O Christ." I started to recite it to him, but I made a mistake at the end. He then told me off, in his own special way, which was more like a caress. "Well, bless you, kid, you're telling me it all wrong. You should know it by heart." He then made such an analysis of the troparion that.

for a moment, I felt myself filled with happiness, next to the resurrected Christ. What a pity that he did not let me tape record what he said, or even to take notes of his accounts. Now I have to try and extract what he said from my few “smuggled” notes and my tired memory. I remember that he spent a long time on interpreting the verse, “Grant that we partake of Thee fully in the unwaning day of Thy Kingdom.” He stressed, “Don’t be sad, kid, ever. Christ rose again to give us much love and joy, from now. We should start participating, more and more noticeably, in the bright day of the reign of God’s love, that never becomes evening.”

### *Hymns of the Church*

The Elder loved the hymns of the Church a great deal, because they were written by saints and made up the theology that expressed the life of Christ, the saints, and even his own life. He was devoted to the Orthodox Church. He viewed it in a formal manner. It was not an impersonal administrative device. Rather, he saw its substance, as the living and dynamic mystical body of Christ. Its members are all baptized Orthodox Christians and its head is Christ Himself. He did not accept any form of secularization of the Orthodox Church at all. He did not accept any sort of compromise with demonic temptations from both left and right. He knew, as has been written, “because the devil fought for centuries to remove the Church from the world, and failed, he now struggles to put the world into the Church. He fights this battle for secularization carefully disguised, to the point that he convinces some people that he does not exist at all.”

### *Church Unity*

The Elder also reacted against all factional and separatist tendencies within the Church. He viewed this as the amputation and division of the united body of Christ. He wanted the improvement of Christian community life to come from the sanctification of persons, embodied in the Church, not cut off from it, whether obvious or not. He pointed out to us that in His prayer (John 17) just before His sacrifice on the cross Christ fervently called upon his heavenly father for the unity of Christians, with the link of His own love, within His unbreakable Church.

It was midday on Great Thursday 1979. I was alone that day, on purpose, to think about the meaning of that great day. At some point, I remembered Fr. Porphyrios. My gaze turned to the telephone and a strong desire to speak with him formed within me. Where would I find him on such a day? Perhaps he came

into my mind himself, like a secret invitation? I had discovered the telephone number of the apartment he was staying at, hidden away from the masses, while recovering from some problems with his health. I crossed myself and dialled the number. Immediately, on the other end of the line the clear, gentle voice of the Elder was heard. It was God's will that we should talk. Then a spiritually moving rite of mystery took place that lasted for over an hour. I welcomed his words like the thirsty earth welcomes rain. I tried to understand him as much as I could. I also mentioned my own thoughts and reminded him of things he had said in the past, connecting them with what I was now saying. It was a lively conversation that was relaxing for me, and, it seemed, for the Elder too. Because at some point he said, "Well, bless you, kid! You remember a lot, but don't write it down, don't talk about it. I don't know what happens to me when it comes to you. I become very talkative and I don't want to stop. You draw me and I pull you in. We are both alike."

His words moved me, especially the last phrase, which surprised me. How was I like the Elder? How could night be like day? How could lukewarm water that gets cold be like hot water that boils? However, the Elder did not make worldly compliments. Whatever he said was true. Later, I found a logical answer to my questions, with the thought that he perhaps meant our innate character. Of course, that did not mean that we were not as far apart as heaven and earth with regard to utilizing our innate characteristics.

The Elder had reached the maturity of holiness. Whereas, when I stood next to him I was like an "aged infant", responsible for my spiritual infancy. For that reason, his remark troubled me more than it made me glad. The Elder was the servant who received "five talents" and "traded with them and made another five talents." I was the servant who received "one talent" and "went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money" (see Matt. 25: 14-30).

The Elder talked to me about many other things in that unforgettable telephone conversation. I especially remember the words he offered me with a slight grumble, yet with warm love towards Christ, "I'm sick in bed. I really wanted to go to Church on such an important day like today, so that I could hear the service of Christ's Passion. I especially wanted to hear the Gospel according to St. John where Christ prays to His Father, "that they may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You" (Jn. 17:21). If we all lived that unity of Christ with His Father there would be no discord or division within the Church.

Instead, we would all be one, brothers and sisters in Christ.

### *Boundless Love for Christ and for Each Person*

The Elder nurtured particular reverence and love for the gospel writer of love, St. John the Evangelist. It seems that he was like both him in terms of innate character and acquired holiness. When Fr. Porphyrios is someday declared a saint of our Church, perhaps he will be known as the “saint of love”. If I was asked what made the deepest impression on me regarding Fr. Porphyrios during all the years that I was in contact with him, I would answer, without fail: his love. His boundless love for the person of Christ and that of every single person. That genuine and faultless, that pure love of his. It moved you; it convinced you; it disarmed you and it conquered you peacefully. It approached Christ’s love, about which He said, “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (Jn. 15:13-14).

The Elder really did sacrifice himself for all people, because he considered them all his friends in the name of Christ. I was once talking to a monk in obedience to him. He knew his love in all his length and breadth. I confessed that I was convinced that the Elder loved me especially. He smiled and said to me, “Many people had that conviction because the Elder had the special gift of offering himself completely to each person, so that each and every person who knew him would believe that he was the “the disciple who he loved”. Therefore, with Elder Porphyrios I appreciated, in some way, the spiritual relationship between St. John the Evangelist and Christ. Through his love, the Elder became the bridge so that we could pass over from our love for him to our love for Christ. This was because he convinced us that he owed what he was completely to Christ.

Christ, in answering Thomas’ relevant question said, “No one comes to the Father except through me” (Jn. 14:6). Perhaps it would not be too much of an exaggeration to say, likewise, that “No one comes to Christ, except through holy elders, living and asleep.” This is because saints are the continuation of God’s life on earth. If you do not become like Christ, you will offer out a Christ in your own likeness instead. The Elder became like Christ, and for that reason offered out a true Christ. It was a Christ of love, affection and attractive, “full of compassion and graciousness, long-suffering and abundant in mercy” (Ps. 86: 15), wise and strong, yet “gentle and lowly in heart” (Matt. 11:29), indulgently tolerant and peaceful. Just like God the Father’s revelation through the Prophet Isaiah, “Behold, my Servant whom I uphold. My Elect one in whom My soul delights! I have put my spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry out, nor raise His voice, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench, He will not fail nor be discouraged till He has established justice in the earth” (Is. 42: 1-4). The Elder was like Christ in many ways, because he offered



earth (Is. 42: 1-4). The Elder was like Christ in many ways, because he offered himself to Christ completely and Christ made him like Himself.

The Elder's love in Christ gave him a comfortable broadness of view and diversity that stunned like a multifarious diamond with its many bright reflections. His spiritual field of vision spread out profitably, even to the most opaque and obscure areas of the soul. The Elder was not trapped by scholastic, fearful, and cowardly predicaments, which pinned down some visitors, making them passively weak-willed or making them have fatalistic self-pity. Living within his own spiritual interior space himself, he was able to stretch out to face a whole variety of human problems and offer countless solutions that were pleasing to God.

Under his protective spiritual umbrella you felt the Lord's words coming into effect for you personally, "in my Father's house there are many rooms". With him, your every predicament found not one, but many, ways out. Under his guidance every sin, every mistake, every loss, was changed into repentance, to forgiveness, to gain. So much so that the devil would become distressed in the end, seeing his work fall down like a pack of cards. Whereas, the sinful person would be glad, feeling his soul rise again from the dead. The Elder's various good deeds recalled the words of St. John the Evangelist, "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil"(1 Jn. 3:8).

### *Respect for Formalities Not Worship of Them*

The Elder did not make external formalities be all and end all. He respected them, but he always aimed at the essence of things through them. He followed the Lord's words, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" (Mk. 2:27). When formalities, which, for the Christian, should serve the essential aim of love in Christ, are cut off from this aim and become an end in themselves, they are altered from something positive into something negative. Someone once wrote that, "when man has lost the essence of a thing he then becomes attached to formalities." He becomes a fanatical and scholastic formalist, self-deluded, with self-satisfaction and man-pleasing pride, thinking that he serves God with these banal acts. His officious formalism, in the place of real worship, becomes the hypocritical alibi that hides his inner emptiness. He is reduced to a frosty, vapid and aimless self-torment "to be seen by men" (Matt. 23:5). This formalism produces Pharisees. Instead of those who worship Christ, it produces those who crucify Him.

## *A Saint in the Middle of the City*

One of the amazingly strange things about the Elder's life is that although he set off to live as a monk in a small monastic skete on the Holy Mountain, by God's providence, he ended up serving as a hieromonk and chaplain for over thirty years at St. Gerasimos' Chapel in the Polyclinic General Hospital in Omonia Square, at the centre of the populous Greek capital, Athens. Here he actually conveyed the sanctified community of the desert to the demonic desert of the city. By Christ's grace the Elder managed, as an ascetic in the world, to transcend the temptations and distractions of the large city, and to keep to his spiritual exercise, by unceasing prayer. He was united with Christ, himself sanctified and sanctifying those around him. He was the first to live out what he would later teach, in simple words, "If you want, you can even become holy in the middle of Omonia."

## *You've Got Me into Trouble*

I had the blessing of being denounced, together with the Elder, for the very same reason, because we accepted each other. I was denounced as a "heretic", by certain "spiritual" circles, because with "naive credulity" I visited a monk of "doubtful worth, who arbitrarily presents himself as a prophet." I opened my heart to him, and, indeed, was so bold as to make him known. Similar circles also denounced the Elder, because he supported some of my views. He said to me, laughing in a good hearted manner, "Man, you've got me into trouble... If only you knew what I hear because of you. Some people came and told me off because I accept you and I justify your views." I was irritated by the way those people thought. I was even more annoyed by the fact that they annoyed the Elder because of me. In contrast, the Elder was calm and smiled at the criticisms made against him. I was interested in others opinions because I was one of those who "received their honour from one another" whereas the Elder was indifferent. He belonged to those who sought "honour from the only God" (Jn. 5:44). Of course, I was different from the Elder. It was the noticeable difference between being man-pleasing and being humble, between passion and dis-passion. Unfortunately, it was not the only time that the Elder was denounced. He was on the receiving end of many unjust attacks and persecutions. Indeed, sometimes it was even from people who should have understood him and supported him. In all the years I knew him he only revealed the slightest things about all this. He revealed most of it with his silence. He forgave everyone everything, preferring that God's love speak instead of him.

It is true that each Christian, by his love, which is often perceived as weakness, is sometimes the target of criticism. This from people who are willing to bow their heads before the mighty of this world and to raise themselves up over the weak of this world. Pharisees - moralists or a libertines gaining pleasure in fabricating guilty people around them, thinking that they serves the truth in this way. Proud and guilty themselves, they do not accept their guilt, but they suppress it projecting it accusingly upon others. The Elder, through his way of life, taught that the Christian should move on the opposing axis: Without inciting the denunciations made against him, he accepted them calmly, without accusing anyone personally. Praying “grant me to see my own faults and not to condemn my brother”<sup>[9]</sup> so that they would repent and be released from all personal guilt. He honestly forgave his accusers.

### *First the Will of God*

The Elder let God play the leading role in every issue in his life. He limited himself to a supporting role, and became a humble achiever of His initiatives regarding himself and others. The truth that nothing is possible without God prevailed absolutely throughout his life. Nothing happened by chance and everything happened according to God’s will. His spiritual conduct recalled Christ’s words, “I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgement is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me” (Jn. 5:30).

I was especially impressed by a certain incident, during my first visit to Kallisia. When we arrived there, with a friend, we found the place deserted. We knocked on the door of some small cell. A nun emerged (it was the Elder’s sister, as we later learnt). We asked her how we could see Fr. Porphyrios. She answered saying that he was away. (I noticed that her behaviour was stark, blunt and unaffected without worldly compliments or pious displays of humility). I asked her if we could see him the next day. She answered tersely, “If God wills it”. Our conversation ended there, even before it had begun. Leaving, I thought, in dissatisfaction, “‘If God wills it’, a fine runaround! Instead of saying, ‘he’ll be here on such and such a day and will be able to see you then’ or that ‘he did not clarify when he would return,’ handing the matter over to God.”

I later realised that I was mistaken in my thoughts and that the nun was speaking literally. The Elder did not make plans. He left the matter of his everyday movements and his meetings with visitors in God’s hands, as he did with every other concern of his. He entrusted God to lay out His own plans for his life. Many years later, various interested parties (who did not know the Elder,

but knew that I had connections with him) asked me, quite naturally, to make an appointment with him. When they said this I smiled, but I excused them remembering what I had gone through.

The Elder's stance was not only founded on faith, but on reason too. One day, when I was first getting to know him, I told him about an extremely busy friend from the provinces who wanted to see him at an appointed time, so that he would not make an unnecessary journey. The Elder replied sadly, "I can't tell him when to come. Shall I say such and such a day? But, I don't know, God knows where I'll be then, and how I'll be. You see, I've got all my sicknesses. I'm well the one minute and unwell the next. Shall I tell him to come at that time and then stand him up? It's not right. So tell him, when he can, come along and say a prayer. If God wills it, I'll see him, if God doesn't will it, I won't see him. That's what I tell everyone. I know that some people don't understand that and misjudge me, thinking that I want to avoid them. But, what can I do?"

### *Initiation into the Earthly Uncreated Church*

However, the Elder did whatever he was obliged to do, and more than was required of him. He received people from the break of day right up until midnight. He did this in a spirit of self-sacrifice. He lightened many people from the burden of their earthly anxieties. He suffered so that he could give them wings, and then they could fly to the heavenly joys that he knew, even for a short while. Those unforgettable moments were exhilarating. It seemed like the doors of Paradise had been opened for you and Christ was waiting there to surround you in the gladness of His boundless love. While at other times in your life, ordinary times, wrapped up in the dust of everyday life you maintained a conventional image of Christ within you, that was formal and distant, now you felt something different. You felt a gladsome light approaching you, an unfamiliar and true Christ. You could not find human words or earthly comparisons to express His heavenly beauty. So much so that, if you tried to write something about Him, you would end up saying what He is not rather than what He is. This inexpressible divine closeness, made you feel, even if only slightly, what the Elder meant when he said "Christ is Everything!" and what Christ said about Himself, "The Kingdom of God is within you" (Lk 17:21). In such blessed moments of spiritual celebration, the Elder behaved like the children that the Lord received. Especially, when he "saw" that you approached, even if only verbally, the significance, of his uplifting experiences. He would then jump for joy. He bounced in his bed, despite being sick and would exclaim triumphantly, "That's it, kid! You've found it. You've understood. Well what would you know, what would you! Come over here so I can give you a slap

would you know, what would you! Come over here so I can give you a slap. Here's one and another, and another." Then later, displaying his enthusiasm even more expressively, he would start ruffling your hair, telling you in a quiet gleeful voice, "Be quiet! Don't talk. Don't say anything about what I told you, because we'll be done for!" I then felt like someone initiated into some secret uprising of divine love, whose aim was to kill off everything that was dark, miserable and sinful within you, so that it could raise you up transfigured in the unwaning light of the "earthly uncreated Church of Christ", as he called it.

### *Did You Understand?*

In contrast, when he saw that you had not understood he asked sadly, "Did you understand what I told you?" When you answered saying that you had not understood he told you the same thing again in more detail or when he saw that the effort would be in vain, he would say, "What am I to do with you? Come again another time." However, when you said that you had understood, unaware of your ignorance, the Elder would answer with cute directness, "Why are you telling me that you've understood, kid, when you haven't?" I then realised that the Elder, as a knower of hearts, was right. His keenest wish was to raise you up to higher levels of practice and theory. However, when he saw your spiritual indolence, he was sad, but he respected your personality. Without insulting you he discreetly left you where he found you, secretly praying for your ascent. The Elder wanted to make us eagles, but we remained sparrows.

### *Sit Down, Don't Leave*

With all this, his love was so strong that it surpassed all our idleness and weaknesses. It was given to us generously and from the source. Once, we were talking and the Elder spoke to me with inspiration. At that moment a nun entered and said that I'd been there for a long time and I really should leave. I got up to go, but the Elder pulled on my jacket, saying to me, "Sit down. Don't leave." To the nun he said, "You go, and leave him here." We continued our pleasant conversation, but in a short while some technician came and started talking to him about matters concerning the church building. I then got up and left the cell of my own accord, realising that I should leave them alone. As soon as the nun saw me in the corridor, she recommended that I should not take up any more of the Elder's time. I left upon her recommendation. On my next visit the nun informed me that as soon as the technician left, he asked for me. When he found out that I had left at her prompting he told her off and told her that she had not done the right thing. This action of his moved me more than if I had stayed in

some the right thing. The action of my, the more more than I had stay in his cell for a while longer.

### *Adversaries and Negators*

The Elder, with his love and with his gifts was a strong magnet for most people. Not for all. Some wilfully ignored him, despite having heard about him. They were thirsty, they passed by the crystal fountain, but they did not bend over to drink, and left still thirsty. Why? Did they not have spiritual vision, to see the beauty of the fountain? Did they not have spiritual hearing to listen to its ripple? God knows. However, nobody could maintain that it is now too late for them. Although the fountain has been moved; it has not dried up. It now flows out in the heavens, more purely, and it is offered to all, more plentifully, by God's grace. Certainly, Attica and the capital of Greece, Athens cannot complain. Even though in the midst of a crisis of all moral values, that gradually worsens, with the rise of vice, violence, greed, selfishness and every kind of sin it had the blessing of embracing a great, noiseless and untiring saint. For over fifty years, he watered thousands of souls with the refreshing water of his gifts. Here, too, he confirms the words of St. Paul: "Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more" (Rom. 5:20).

Somewhere Dostoyevsky writes, "If someone proves to me that Christ is far from the truth and that the truth is far from Christ, I would prefer to stay with Christ rather than with the truth." I could repeat that phrase, not only about Christ, but also about the Elder. Some people called him into question. They rejected him and tried to convince me that they were right. Of course, I found their arguments to be reasonably arbitrary, for the most simple reason, they were talking about a person they did not know. Yet, even if they did get to know him, and proved, with their own opinion, that the Elder was far from the truth, I would still stick with him. Their proof would be based on a human level, with all the weaknesses of subjective human reason, whereas their proof of the Elder's superiority over their "truth" would be based on the witness of my own personal experience that went beyond reason. I was convinced about the Elder's holiness in the grace of Christ not only by mind, but by my heart, my will and by something much deeper within me, that expresses me and is beyond me. Likewise, many others could answer those who call the Elder into question saying, "that which we have seen and we have heard we declare to you that you may also have fellowship with us" (1 Jn 1:3)

### *Refuge*

The Elder, with his self-evident holiness, was not just of undeniable spiritual worth, but he became, without trying, the measure for evaluating the spiritual worth of others. A friend of mine once had an unexpected adventure. He disagreed with a person he knew about some serious matter. In his attempt to communicate with him he thought up the idea of seeking the support of the man's spiritual father. This was despite the fact that he had never even seen him. He went and met him, unsuspectingly, without inquiring about his way of thinking beforehand. He opened his heart up to him, in a spirit of trust and self-reproach. However, the spiritual father dealt with him strictly and attempted a humiliating psychoanalysis on him. This was because while he had praised his rival for his virtues, his rival had deplored him for his faults. He thus condemned him for his views and assured the spiritual father that he was speaking in his best interests. Therefore, rather than closing the small crack the spiritual father managed to turn it into a great rift.. Upset by what had unexpectedly befallen him, my friend turned to Fr. Porphyrios, who "saw" what the real situation was from the very beginning. The Elder said to him regarding his rival, "Do you know how he now views you, my child? Like an ant." Regarding the spiritual father he said, "Oh dear, oh dear! How did the blessed thing become so deluded!!! What was he thinking of? He based himself on the information given by your rival and made you an outcast. Such a way of handling things can really harm the other person. You know, some spiritual fathers play the psychiatrist"

That distressing incident with my friend got me thinking. If the Christian does not want to hear the words of the Prophet Isaiah, "My name is blasphemed continually every day" (Is. 52:5) to be applied to himself he is obliged to accept each and every person with humility as an image of God and not to look at him arrogantly "like an ant". If a spiritual father does not want to be turned in to a false shepherd who harms his sheep, he is obliged to be discerning, compassionate, unbiased. If he is prejudiced towards "his own" and against "strangers", he will be entrapped in demonic delusion that will first wrap up himself and then wrap up "his own". (God will find his own way to protect the strangers). Furthermore, he is obliged to avoid playing the psychiatrist. His road is sanctification in Christ, so that with the gradual purification and illumination of his soul he will achieve his own self knowledge and knowledge of others.

Conversely, if he resorts to psychiatric methods, and indeed unsuitable ones, he will be disorientated and will fail. Even psychiatrists themselves face unsurpassable obstacles regarding the knowledge and cure of the soul.

This is why the choice of a saintly, and not secular, spiritual father is the most important and urgent job of every Orthodox believer. When we disregard the effort, time, expense, and distance when looking for a good doctor who will take

care of our corruptible body what should we do when looking for our spiritual father who will take care of our eternal soul? Good spiritual fathers still do exist, but because they are humble, they hide like Fr. Porphyrios. In order to find them we must become very humble ourselves. We must make great efforts, like divers who search the depths of the ocean for priceless pearls. It is a search that in the end brings the joy of the great find, as Christ confirms, “The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he found one pearl of great price went and sold all he had, and bought it” (Matt. 13: 41)

### *The Beauty of Goodness*

Elder Porphyrios was just such a priceless and beautiful pearl. Someone once said in his prayer, “Lord, make bad people good and make good people beautiful in their goodness.” Unfortunately, there are plenty of good people who are ugly in their goodness. Perhaps that sounds like an oxymoron, yet it expresses a reality. There are people who have goodness but let foreign elements, opposing elements, enter in and they adulterate it and make it ugly. The Elder had pure goodness and it was beautiful for that reason. Dostoyevsky also wrote, “Beauty will save the world.” Not aesthetic beauty, which is soulless and soon withers, but the beauty of goodness, which has an unfading soul. The beauty of the Elder’s goodness saved and will save many people.

### *Simplicity in Speech*

One expression of this beauty of the Elder’s was his speech. His words were simple, graceful and correct. He talked from experience. Consequently, he did not try to envisage the meaning of a certain role, like an actor, so that he could convey it in words with the greatest possible reliability. Rather he externalised the truth about himself naturally and unaffectedly. He did not want to create art with his words, because all his life was a great work of divine art. Therefore, his words were profound in content and attractive in form. Despite being uneducated, he did not make mistakes in syntax. He always used words and phrases that were well placed and pleasing, often original and impressive, with clarity and clear diction. You could never get enough of hearing him, however long his accounts took. They were “sweeter than honey and the honeycomb” (Ps. 18: 11) and spread a fragrance of sanctity round about. His words contained not only beauty and strength, but revealing meanings, much more important than they seemed on the outside. You needed to have the insight, patience and persistence of a gold miner, so that you can dig deep down and try to decipher them. Since, for us, the spiritually-challenging words are simply a symbol and



ment. Since, for us, the spiritually shallow, words are simply a symbol and outline of our inner living experiences. How much more so for the Elder whose life experiences were, in the most part, high-flying and difficult to see. Yet, the Elder's outer words always "in grace, seasoned by salt" could be an example for many modern people and especially the "lettered".

### *Calm Fighting Spirit*

I was always amazed by his calm fighting spirit. We have become used to seeing fighters who are feisty, anxious and aggressive, or hesychasts who are lifeless, inert and passive. The Elder's rare personality harmoniously combined dissimilar virtues, devoid of their congenital weaknesses. You felt that there was a calm strength flowing from within him. He was able to resist the attacks against him peacefully and robustly. He fended them off and crushed them with such a calm composure that we did not even have the slightest suspicion of the sort of mighty contests that went on within him. This is because, unlike us, who live uneasily within ourselves and amongst others, the Elder lived serenely "in Christ and Christ in him". This is why he was like the "wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock" (Matt. 7: 24- 25).

### *Interested in Everything*

In his great spiritual struggle, the Elder looked to Christ, before and above anything else. I remember the Convent. It was his great love. He struggled with all his might to build it from nothing. He took care of it like a mother bringing up her child. He took great care so that its location would be ideal. So that, as he said, "the sun will enter the cell windows in the winter, but not in the summer." The plans, and every part of the construction work, got his blessing beforehand. In essence, he took the lead and supervised everything. However, his great love was the church of the monastery. He would talk to me for hours on end about the Church of the Transfiguration of the Saviour and its future mission. Often, the following strange thing would happen: although I was listening to him develop his opinions, with great interest, about matters that concerned me, suddenly he would put those matters aside and turn our conversation towards the monastery's church. He spoke about it with such exaltation and enthusiasm, that I would quickly get over some unconfessed feeling of resentment, because of the inglorious abandonment of my personal matters. Instead, I was gladdened by his joy. Trying to follow him in his spiritual upliftment. Certainly, regarding the

Elder, nothing ever was, essentially, strange.

He did not lay my interests aside in order to give precedence to his own. There was no 'mine' and 'yours' with him; there was only 'ours'. He simply wanted to break me away from my vain earthly concerns, so that he could raise me up to his eternal heavenly experiences. He struggled to make them something common for everybody. This was because he saw that within the communion of the Holy Spirit all problems would find their ideal solution. One day he said to me, "Our monastery will be very beautiful. The church will be built in front and the cells will be behind it. Just like in a battle, the general at the head and the soldiers behind him. Christ in front, us behind."

### *Celebrating the Mysteries*

The Elder really did follow in the footsteps of Christ, "denying himself and taking up his cross" (Matt. 16:24, Mk. 8:34). He did it with such complete dedication of life it is only to be expected that he touched people and convinced them, especially when he celebrated the Divine Liturgy. Then he really did, "Move from death to life and from heaven to earth". I will always remember a summer vigil, at the old chapel of St. Nicholas at Kallisia, where the Elder served. His words, when addressing the prayers, were pronounced one by one, clearly with most obvious emotion. His psalmody was refined, but expressive, it conveyed deep fervour.

The divine evocation reached its peak at the Great Entrance, where the Elder appeared with ritual solemnity, chanting humbly. He held the Holy Chalice with such devotion that it reminded you of a caring mother who tenderly holds her baby in her arms. He was like the Virgin with Child. It was apparent that the Elder, at that moment, was living out the journey of Christ to Golgotha, in order to offer his great sacrifice, for the salvation of the world. The chapel was small and there was not enough room for everybody. The service was long, and lasted until morning. The seats for those at the candle-stand were negligible. However, the faithful discreetly offered their seats to those that were standing and went out into the yard for a while. It was radiant in the light of the moon and it made you feel like you were living in a divine dream.

The Elder took great pleasure in the divine services. However, in his last years he was deprived of that joy. He was kept in bed by sickness, and could no longer walk to go to the church. He was obliged to participate in the Divine Liturgy only by listening to it with a small radio. One day he said, with a grievance, "I really am sorry that I can't go to Church. Well, I'm comforted by this radio. I listen to the Divine Liturgy from there. I asked a bishop if what I did was a sin

and he said that because I'm sick it's not a sin." How many of us, however, who are considered to be healthy, and attend Church, participate in Divine Worship with all our being like the Elder did from his sick-bed via the radio?

### *A Vision about the Author*

The Elder participated in the life of Christ not only in soul, but in body too. For him the life in Christ was not something in the past, but it was something continually present. He was sick with heart trouble, and I had lost track of him for quite a while. Then, at some time, I discovered him, staying as a guest in someone's house. I got his blessing to pay him a short visit. Emotionally moved, I entered his room. I did not want to tire him out with conversation. It was enough for me to kiss his hand silently. As soon as he saw me, his face lit up with the smile of his love. I knelt before his bed, took his hand, kissed it, rested my forehead on it and immersed myself into a deep prayer to Christ. At some point I raised my head and was faced with a strange sight: The Elder sitting motionless on his bed, with his facial characteristics altered, staring at the wall opposite in ecstasy. I was overcome with awe. I did not say anything to him. I waited. At some point he turned to me with an emotional voice and said, "Did you see him?" "Did I see what, Elder?" I asked. "Christ... Christ passed by in front of us. He was carrying his cross and walking along the road to Golgotha, staggering from the weight of the cross. It was shortly before Simon of Cyrene appeared. I saw him the moment when we were praying together. I saw him very clearly, very well. I wonder what that could mean? Perhaps the sacrifice we should bear with love? Who was it for? For me? For you? Who knows?" I froze in my seat in shock. It was the first time I had ever heard such a revelation of his. When I started to recover from my surprise I tried to answer his questions saying, "Father, I'm not in a position to know the meaning of what you saw, you know the meaning?" He replied, "I don't know." Then I said, "Father, perhaps it means that the Resurrection of soul is approaching because without the Cross there is no Resurrection." Perhaps it denotes the words of ailing St. Paul: 'my strength is made perfect in weakness'." The Elder answered "Who knows?" A short while later I got up in order to leave. The Elder blessed me with a cheerful expression on his face. He made the sign of the cross over my head three times, I kissed his hand and left. Until my next visit, which took place quite a while later, I was constrained by great emotion regarding the Elder's unprecedented vision. When I saw him again, I told him about the awe that had overcome me. He replied, smiling with affection, "Don't be afraid, the vision is for good." I asked him, "What could it possibly mean?" He answered, "It means a sacrifice of love

for Christ and for your neighbour.” I again asked, “Who was it for? For you or for me?” The Elder said, “Since I saw it when there was only you in the room means that it was for you.”

Many years have passed since then and that vision of the Elder’s does not leave my thoughts. Does it concern my past, my present or my future? Or all of them together. I do not know. Christ and the Elder know. What I do know is that I am indebted, before God and my neighbour, with the sacrifice of love that I did not give them.

Quite a few friends have called me blessed because I was in contact with Fr. Porphyrios for so many years. I said to them, “I thank God for the relationship, which was the greatest favour in my life, and indeed, after a great trial. I consider that contact with Fr. Porphyrios to be an honour for me, but more as a debt, an unsettled bill. Only his prayers can help me pay off that great debt, if only just a small part of it. His prayers have greater power now that he is close to Christ and he sings hymns to him like the nightingale from Mt. Athos that he once told me about.

### *A Poet*

It was a summer day when I met him in the Oropos forest. The Elder remembered his youthful life as a monk on the Holy Mountain. He recounted, “One spring morning, I set off to go to the neighbouring monastery. I was walking along a deserted path in the forest. At that moment, the sun was rising from behind the mountain. Some of its rays passed through the thick foliage of the trees and reached the path. At some turning in the road, I suddenly hear the beautiful song of a nightingale. I stood there and looked around. I saw the nightingale in the branch of a tree. He strained his little throat and sang such sweet songs from his open mouth. I have never heard sweeter birdsong. I was filled with emotion. I stretched out my hand towards the bird and said, “My little nightingale, who taught you to sing so beautifully, so that even the greatest singer cannot compare to you? Why do you put all your strength and all your art into singing here in this deserted place where no-one can hear you? Are you perhaps singing your Maker and are you thanking Him? That’s what I asked him. Do you know what I realised at that moment? That the nightingale really was singing hymns to God. He was singing his matins.” I looked at the Elder in amazement, taken up in his vivid tale. I had a genuine poet before me at that moment. Then I realised that the most genuine, the most beautiful poets are the saints. They do not try to invent poems because their whole life flows effortlessly like a heavenly poem. A poem of divine longing for Christ, that they recite and sing every day and every night, giving glory to the original Poet, God

recite and sing every day and every night, giving glory to the original Poet, God the Maker of all, just like the nightingale. It really would be worth it for an artist to use his paintbrush to immortalise this image of Fr. Porphyrios talking with the sweet-sounding bird, one spring dawn, in the woods of the Holy Mountain.

<sup>[1]</sup> According to the Septuagint (LXX). *[Translator]*.

<sup>[2]</sup> Here the author quotes the title of a work by St. Mark the Ascetic found in the first volume of the Philokalia anthology. The full passage can be found in the English translation by G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard and Kallistos Ware, "Philokalia: The Complete Text", London 1979. *[Translator]*.

<sup>[3]</sup> The pelican is sometimes used as a symbol in Christian art and literature. The young of the pelican usually feed themselves by obtaining regurgitated food from their parent's gullet. It was believed that when the pelican had no food to feed its young, it spread out its wings and wounded itself in the chest, so that the young could feed from its blood and gain life (see the commentaries of Origen, Eusebius and others on the Psalm 101/2:6). In the same way, Christ spread out his arms on the cross, and we, His children, feed from His precious life-giving blood. In the Matins of Holy Saturday (usually sung on the evening of Good Friday) we sing, "Wounded in Thy side, O Word, through the life-giving drops of Thy blood as the pelican Thou hast restored Thy dead children to life." *Lenten Triodion*, trans. Mother Mary and Bishop Kallistos Ware, London 1978, p. 637. *[Translator]*.

<sup>[4]</sup> i.e. the western, non-Orthodox mind-set, originally introduced by the Franks, who distorted true Orthodox doctrine, resulting in schism. *[Translator]*.

<sup>[5]</sup> The Nicolaitans were an early Cristian gnostic sect that encouraged sexual immorality and fornication. Condemned in the Book of Revelation 2:6

<sup>[6]</sup> As mentioned elsewhere *psyche* means *soul* in Greek. Therefore we could say the Elder is a Soul-Doctor, Soul-ologist, Soul-Analyst, and Soul-Therapist *[Translator]*.

<sup>[7]</sup> See also Psalm 64:6 "Both the inward thought and the heart of man are deep". *[Translator]*.

<sup>[8]</sup> The great hermit is Szzzzzt. Anthony and the incident is mentioned in the *Gerontikon or Sayings of the Desert Fathers*. *[Translator]*.

<sup>[9]</sup> From the Prayer of St. Ephrem the Syrian said throughout Great Lent.

## 17. TOWARDS ETERNITY

### *Flying with Divine Eros*

The Elder was a nightingale in the wilderness, who gave glory to God in his life for the world that He created and thanked Him for the love that he granted us. It reminded me of something I had read at the lectern in the small chapel of St. Nicholas when I first visited Kallisia, “Those who live the solitary life are called blessed; they fly with divine eros.” Later, on another visit, at the house he was staying at while sick, I found him sitting on the bed. Next to him was a friend, one of his spiritual children. At that moment, he was talking to him about remembrance of death. Then the Elder said to us, “It is not the only road to salvation. Another person wants to approach God, not with remembrance of death, but with remembrance of love. He turns his soul upwards and calls on God (he made a characteristic gesture, lifting his hands and his gaze upwards). He asks Him to grant him His love, so that he can also love. He also finds his road to salvation.” The Elder showed us a golden road to salvation, which he himself obviously walked along. With his ascetic struggle, he had overcome fear of death and of hell, he had even overcome the expectation of reward in Paradise, because he already had a foretaste of Paradise here “flying with divine eros”

### *Become Immortal From Now*

On another visit, I was very sad, because, I had been struck by a series of trials in a short space of time. They threatened to bend my resilience. In that darkness, one thought gave me great comfort and courage. I told the Elder about it as soon as I entered his cell. “You know,” I told him, “before I reveal it to you that I’m going through trials, yet again. You should also know how I am comforted by the thought that in this earthen world that we live in, everything is

empty and temporary. We need just a little bit more patience, because both joys and sorrows will soon pass and the great moment will come when death will lead me into immortal life, that I wish, unworthy as I am, to be worthy on, with your prayers, so that I can live with Christ.” I waited for his approval about my musings, but I was taken aback when I heard him react strongly against them. He said, “Kid, don’t have such thoughts, that you’ll die and you’ll enter heavenly immortal life. Struggle to become immortal from now, by dying here on the earth to your bad self. In this way, you won’t be sad, but you’ll be very glad, living together with Christ. So, you shouldn’t be afraid of trials, or Satan, or death, because you’ll be victorious over all of them here, from the earth, so that you’ll be ready for the immortal life of heaven.” I looked at him with joyful surprise, “Elder, what you said is wonderful. It gives me much more comfort than the thoughts I told you about earlier. They’ve boosted my morale and made me glad. Really, they remind me of a sign over the entrance of a monastery on the Holy Mountain: “If you die before you die when you die you will not die.”

As soon as the Elder heard that he became enthusiastic, He said in a lively voice, “Write that down for me quickly, in my phone book, on a blank page.” I also wrote down and mentioned two more short thoughts from St. John of the Ladder. He liked both of them a lot and shouted out, “Write those down straightaway in the phone book too.” I wrote them down. Then he made a request. “Get an notebook and write down whatever good thing you come across in the Bible and the Patristic books that you study. Bring it to me and read it to me so that I can also take pleasure in them. Whatever I say is also written down in the Gospel, too.” I remember that that meeting became a spiritual banquet. The Elder had become so enthusiastic that he was like a small child. He was like those saints who are fools for Christ, who out of the unbearable joy of their divine eros were drunk with “sober drunkenness”. They met with “heavenly ecstasy” so that with the short-sighted glasses of reason they would appear strange and senseless. At that moment I also struggled with the props of my reason, wretch that I am, to reach the Elder, who was flying with the wings of his divine eros. What I could determine from his words was that he was urging me to rise up, away from my passive patience with the trials, and from my expectation of death as a possible redeemer. Instead, I would rise up towards the struggle to deaden my old self, my self of sin, and to resurrect my new self, of love in Christ. This new self would conquer trials and the devil and death, leading me to immortal life, “from now, from this earth.”

The next time we met the Elder again spoke about man’s immortality. Indeed, he tried to find the relevant passage from the Gospel, saying, “I know that St. John the Evangelist writes it in his eighth chapter, but I can’t remember the exact

words. You help to, perhaps we'll manage to find it." I tried to remember, but naturally did not find a thing. Then I heard his cheerful voice saying, "Ah, I've found it, that's it. Christ says, "Most assuredly I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death" (Jn. 8:51). He then went on to make a most theological analysis about the person who is born again, transfigured, dead to sin and raised up to Christ, the person who starts to live the immortal life from this life, now.

### *I Want the Church to be Completed and Then I'll Leave*

It was midday in summer, and I was sitting on my own with the Elder, underneath a pine-tree, that protected us from the scorching sun. A little way off we could hear the noises from the building work for one of the wings of the monastery. The Elder was worn down by his illnesses, but his mind and heart were alert and following the work, that was making slow progress with difficulty. He turned to me at one moment and said, "Well, my child, I don't know what the matter is. When we set off make faster progress, when people turn up to give us plenty of help, something happens at the last moment and it holds the work up." I then said to him, on impulse, "Elder, you are doing the work of God. Won't the devil do his own work? Will he sit there idly?" The Elder looked at me with interest and said, "You know, you are right. It's like that. The obstacles that turn up every so often are devilish. Yet, whatever the devil does, we'll build our monastery. We'll build the church too. I really want the church to be finished and then I'll leave for heaven." Listening to the last phrase, I was disturbed. I knew that the Elder had already reached the fullness of his days. I knew that, because of his sicknesses, his life "hung on a piece of thread". I knew that someday the cruel moment of separation would come, but unconsciously, I violently rejected that prospect. I did not want to come to terms with it. That's why my immediate reaction was to say to him half-jokingly, "If it's like that Elder, we'll hold up the church, as much as we can." The Elder told me off, "Don't say such things, kid. The church must be completed and then I'll leave."

However, I kept having the gut conviction, almost irrationally, that, especially with Fr. Porphyrios, something would happen in the end, so that he would not die. Many years before, some monk, who knew him, informed me that the Elder was seriously ill and would die. It was at the time when I needed him a lot (when did I not need him?) and my reaction was direct, strong and full of faith. I said to the monk in a steady voice, the following somewhat incomprehensible, "If Fr. Porphyrios dies, Christ won't die. Therefore neither will Fr. Porphyrios die."



The monk looked at me strangely and moved away. The months and years that passed confirmed my conviction. A pleasing, vague rumour went around amongst his spiritual children that the Elder would not die.

Later I came to terms with a more realistic image. A young man who knew nothing about the spiritual life visited the Elder. However, the Elder influenced him in a positive way. He asked him what he should do, and the Elder told him to find a good spiritual father for confession. The young man answered him with simplicity saying that he would not go to other fathers. The Elder told him that he could come and confess to him.

The youth replied saying, "You're old and you'll soon die."

The Elder answered "I won't die soon".

"Yes, but I want you to live for a hundred years," insisted the youth.

"For your sake," the Elder answered, "I'll live for a hundred years."

On the basis of this unfounded information, a rumour went around that the Elder would live for a hundred years. But even if he did live for a hundred years, the problem would still not be solved for his numerous visitors.

### *Serving a Saint*

One afternoon when visiting the Elder I found him on his sick-bed. We spoke for a short while and at some moment I heard him saying to me, "I feel stiff, after being so many hours in bed without moving, please sit me up for a while so that I can recover." I bent over. I caught hold of his shoulders with care and gradually lifted him up.

At that moment, I quivered at my thought. I asked myself, "I wonder am I consciously aware of what I am doing now? Christ has made me worthy, unworthy that I am, to embrace the body of a future saint, who thousands of people will call upon in their prayers years later, and will venerate his relics that will work miracles." When he sat down, I fixed up his cardigan. I covered him with a blanket, so that he would not get cold, and I put his feet into his slippers. The Elder had given himself up, unable to do otherwise, to my caring attention, thanking me every now and then with a humble smile. Yet, I secretly thanked Christ, because, with His boundless love and humility, He gave me the honour of serving Him, even only an infinitesimal little bit, in the person of one of His sanctified servants. A servant who was a true member of His Body. How fortunate I would be if I felt that exceptional honour each and every time that Christ gives me the opportunity to offer up my services, "for the least of His brethren", that is every fellow human being, even the most sinful. Throughout his whole life, even when he was frail from sickness and old age, with his sanctified humility and love, the Elder could discern and serve Christ without

sanctified humility and love, the Elder could discern and serve Christ without prejudice in the face of every “least brother”.

### *Pray For Me*

A few months before he left for the Holy Mountain I visited him in his cell. Even though he was very sick he kept me there for a quite a while. He gave me moving personal advice in a low voice. Amongst other things he said, enigmatically, “Pray to God for me. Not so that He cures my sickness, but so that He has mercy on me. Only that.” It was like the prelude to a departure. Yet, I did not want to interpret his words in that way. I linked it with his teaching about the spiritual “prayer rule” when physically sick. It seems that the Elder meant something else. When he stopped talking to me I kissed his hands and his feet, he blessed me, and as I headed for the door, as though I sensed something, I turned and looked at him.

He was laying on the bed, worn out, with his eyes shut, and his mouth half-open, breathing with difficulty. He looked like he was at death’s door. I shuddered. But I violently rejected that thought and let my imagination fly. I went back to our unforgettable meetings in the forest of Kallisia, when he was younger and could walk steadily and speak to me in a louder voice. He would often break off his conversation with that crystal, winning, holy smile of his. I cried, and while I said to myself, “Well, Elder where did those beautiful days go? At that moment he lifted his hand a little and indicated that I should come near. His lips started to whisper something. I knelt down. I put my ear close to his mouth and heard, “Well, where are the old days? Do you remember when I was well and we walked together in the forest? You told me your troubles and I comforted you.” “I remember, Elder” I said quietly, and a sob choked my voice. The Elder did not speak again. He just lifted his hand up slowly, held my head and stroked my hair. I just about managed to say a few words, “Dear father, I really want to stay with you, but you are very sick and I should not tire you any more. Your blessing, Father.” I kissed his hand again and left hurriedly with my head bent low, so that the other visitors would not see my tears. It was our last meeting.

### *Farewell*

At the end of November 1991, I visited the Monastery with two friends. They informed that the Elder was away on the Holy Mountain and they were expecting him back as soon as his health improved. We got ready to leave but at that moment I felt an irresistible power drawing me to the Elder’s cell. I got the

that moment when an incredible power drawing me to the Elder I felt the blessing of the Abbess, and I opened the door. I felt like I was entering the sanctuary of some church. I venerated the large icon of the Mother of God, then I approached the Elder's bed. I kissed his pillow, the middle of the bed, and the other end where he used to rest his feet. Suddenly I felt an unprecedented, compelling emotion overwhelming. Shaken, I left the cell and just about managed to say a few words to my friends about the Elder's incomparable love. I told them that no-one in the whole world, not even my parents, not even my brothers and sisters, not even my friends, nor anyone else had loved me with so much true, pure, holy love as Fr. Porphyrios had. I tried to carry on. I wanted to tell them everything was flooding my soul like a torrent, but I could not. Tears choked me. It was the first time that I cried sobbing before his empty cell, like a small child who had been orphaned. I had often venerated his cell when he was absent, but always with joyful calm. However, at that distinct moment, I felt that I was secretly getting the answer if the holy father's love. The father who was preparing for his great journey, that I was getting his last "spiritual embrace". It was to an unworthy spiritual child, who, however, was bold enough to come close to him, for his last journey. I could not explain it rationally. However, the heart has its own intelligence, because it has its own eyes, to see what cannot be seen, and its own ears, to hear what cannot be heard. I saw and heard the Elder, as though he were near me. Like the time when he said, "What a miracle! The bodies far apart, the souls together!" My soul affectionately embraced his soul, in a secret last farewell.

This emotion continued, more mildly, for the next couple of days. On the third day, I received a phone call from a friend: "Did you learn about the Elder?"

"What's the matter?" I asked, and immediately guessed what the brutal answer was.

"He's left. He fell asleep last night and was buried at dawn this morning."

I let go of the receiver and hid my face in the palms of my hands, which were soon flooded with tears. I did not begin to cry for him then; I simply continued the silent mourning lament that I had started three days before, there, outside his humble, empty cell.

## Some Final Words

My respected and beloved Elder,

Not long before you left for the heavenly homeland, you left us the message of your unfailing love: “Even when I leave, I’ll carry on speaking to you, but will you listen?” I cannot know if I hear you, I do know that you hear me.

I started, not on my own initiative, to record my memories of my discipleship with you. It is a difficult work when someone so small attempts to write about someone so great, such a sinner about such a saint.

I thank you because you helped my weak memory. But you can see that despite your help, what I have written is not worthy of the gifts that you received so early on. You preserved them worthily until the end of your life on this earth. I feel that, however much I could recognise in you, it is a very small part before the enormity of your holiness. I feel that all that I wrote down and tried to interpret is very poor, before the wealth of your love. I have left out quite a lot, such as things that are very personal for me or others. I have forgotten some things and could not find the words to express others.

I know that whatever I wrote about you is a drop in the ocean, a dull lamp-light held to the sun, subjective ill-treatment, rather than an objective projection of your grace-filled personality. It will need many small oil-lamps to join their faint flames together to shed even a little light on the real image of your soul. Above all, it will need another saint, like yourself, to be sent from God, to write your biography truthfully. Until then, we’ll comfort ourselves, telling each other all that each of us shortsightedly saw and half-deafly heard. I ask for forgiveness regarding the weakness and mistakes, the exaggerations and omissions of the text. I ask that the Lord does not allow any soul to be possibly harmed by reading it.

Elder, you know better than I do how much being a spiritual orphan cost me, because you know what your presence in my life meant. I would dare to say that you split it into two. My life before I knew you, and afterwards. It was late when I met you. Had I known you sooner I would have avoided many traps. All the years that I knew I often made you sad with my spiritual and bodily laziness and unwillingness to follow your advice and the holy example of your life, that shone out, warmed and melted like a paschal candle on the sacrifice of love.

You lived with the love and humility of the saints and that is the way you left

You lived with the love and humility of the saints and that is the way you left. When I was informed about your passing, you were already resting in your final earthly dwelling. Your affectionate love did not want thousands of your children to travel in winter and come to your funeral. Your discerning humility did not allow the delivery of speeches praising your virtues, at a public funeral and veneration. You asked your disciples on the Holy Mountain to announce your death after your burial. You left as you came, "Caring, humble, quietly."

You took off from the holy mountainsides of Athos and landed in the sinful valley of Athens. Enduring your continual sickness with the fortitude of Job, you warmed up frozen hearts, you gave light to darkened minds, you shored up withered knees. You lifted up your heavy cross with love. You did this without stopping, even for a moment, from uplifting others, so that they could lift up their own cross. When you completed your work and awaited your end on the earth, you flew back to the hut of your repentance, where you were able to say your final "it is finished". You often said to me, "I want to go to the Holy Mountain. I rest there." Christ accepted your holy wish and gave you rest forever, in the Orchard of his All Holy Mother. Now you live the resurrection, as we all pray, hope and believe, because you had a foretaste of the Resurrection from here.

When you lived on our earth, we always had a problem. We were never able to meet you. Now that problem has been solved. You told us that, "For Christ and the departed saints we are welcomed at the most unsuitable times." Now, our problem is no longer when we will be able to see you, but how can we develop spiritual hearing so that we can hear you as you talk to us.

You knew that our difficulties continued unabatedly even after your departure. I am certain that not only do you want to, but you can help us more than before. We have acquired a strong ambassador to heaven in your person. I believe that you will also pray for us, like Christ did for His disciples, "Father, I desire that they also who you gave Me may be with Me where I am" (Jn. 17:24). We cannot dare to think that we will find ourselves up there where you are. But we do not want to depart from you. The saints confirm that death cannot break the bond that joins the Elder to his spiritual children. We were and we want to be your spiritual children forever, not to be worthy of you, but to be your children. It is enough that with your prayers and our repentance we will be able to approach your heavenly cell, so that we can gain comfort and strength for our fight.

By the icon-corner, I have your photograph. On the bed, the prayer-rope that you blessed. Around my neck, the little cross that you gave me. They are the tangible signs of your presence. But the most tangible sign is within the heart, that is filled with joy every time the lips whisper, "saints of God pray for us." Because you are now amongst all the saints of the Church, you are our own

Because you are now amongst all the saints of the Church, you are our own person there. You give glory to God together with all the saints, like the nightingales on the Holy Mountain. You are jubilant together with them enjoying Christ, “who is Everything” undisturbed. You also pray together for the members of the Church militant, so that they will be worthy of entering the Church triumphant...

There are other moments when I think of you. Then, my eyes overflow with tears and my soul is filled with peacefulness. I do not know what it is that I am feeling. Sorrow, joy or both together? Whatever it is, I know that it is inexpressibly good. Perhaps during those blessed moments your prayers to the Lord are strengthened and limit my spiritual deafness? Because you did not stop talking from the time you left for heaven. During those moments of pious emotion, I asked my self with a shudder: Perhaps, with you, I am also repeating Christ’s words to his disciples, “It is to your advantage that I go away” (Jn. 16:7). Perhaps this sorrow and joy together of the Cross and the Resurrection directly echoes the Lord’s promise, “I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you” (Jn. 14:18) and “you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no- one will take from you” (Jn. 16:22).

Each time that I experience those glorious emotions, I long to be able to hear you, more and more clearly. I long to hear your words, so that I can learn, little by little, to pronounce your own language, the language of your humble love. I long to be like the simple monk who talked to St. Nicholas as though he were alive. Because you are alive. The problem is my own spiritual deadness that comes from my sinful life. It is because I still have not decided to follow what you told me here on earth, “Become immortal from now, dying here on the earth to your bad self.” You taught me this not only in words but also with your life. Because with your unstinting and unfailing fight “you died before you died” and when death came it respected you. It did not touch you since it found that you were “immortal from now”, from here on earth. Your love in Christ overcame death. It is not by chance that we did not see you dead. We always remember you alive. You kept to Christ’s words faithfully and that is why you “shall never see death” (Jn. 8:51).

In my hands, I hold the small leaflet with your letter to your spiritual children. On the first page, I see your photograph on the Convent balcony with your beloved large icon of the Mother of God, which I venerated so often. You said to me, “First you’ll venerate the Panagia, then you’ll kiss my hand.” On the last page I see your simple grave, with the plain wooden cross with your name upon it, the earth, that covered your earthen tabernacle and wild flowers round about you, to symbolise the heavenly flowers of your heart’s tender love. In the pages in between I read your letter. How wisely you advised us. with how much self-

reproach you talk about your life, with how much trust you await the judgement of the love of God, with how much humility you ask us to forgive you for whatever you did “to upset us”, we who upset you so much with our sins. If you, who sacrificed yourself for us, ask for forgiveness from us, how much forgiveness should we ask from you? Yet, however much great it is you will offer it willingly, with your great love that knows no bounds.

You said about my spiritual Father, “He lived Christ; he went to Christ.” I believe that it is the same thing with you. Here on the earth, it was not you that lived, but Christ lived within you. All the miraculous things you said and did, were words and acts of Christ “through you”. You hid yourself, so that God would appear more clearly “within you”. You drew us close to you, so that you would lead our souls to union with the Bridegroom Christ.

You tired yourself and went to great pains, loving Christ and people “in Christ”. Now you are justly glad and rest in the “adorned bridal chamber” of the Saviour wherein “there is no pain, sorrow nor sighing.” Now you participate more impressively in the great Pascha, “in the unwaning day of the Kingdom” of Christ, “where the unceasing sound of those celebrating and the boundless pleasure of those who behold the untold beauty of His Countenance”.

Please, Elder, accept these poor writings of mine, as an earthly thank-you letter in reply to your fatherly farewell letter. Accept it as the least expression of gratitude for the great things that you offered to me. Accept it as a plea for forgiveness for the bitterness I gave you. Accept it as an appeal to your unfailing love, so that you do not forget me up there in heaven, that you will not forget your spiritual children and you will remember the whole world.

I would like, Father, if I could, to speak to you more expressively and loudly and I would also like to be silent. This is because our kindest desires, our brightest ideas, our most tender feelings are not expressed in words, but in our silent prayer to Christ, who unites us all, with secret understanding, within His divine, vast and eternal Love.

*THE END*

*AND GLORY BE TO GOD NOW AND EVER  
AND TO THE AGES OF AGES. AMEN*

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Wise Discretion  
Taught by God  
He Received Everybody  
He Respected All  
I'm Neither a Magician nor a Prophet  
Missionary From an Ascetic's Cell  
Fullness, Thoroughness, the Middle Way  
A True Helper  
Genuinely Humble and Prepared  
Serious and Cheerful  
Full of Humanity  
Fearless  
Full Knowledge in Both Body and Soul  
Diagnosis Contrasting Sentimental Words with Real Emotions  
Words of Parable  
Silent Blessing  
Analytical Explanations  
Sympathy and Help  
Circumspect and Prudent  
Unprejudiced  
Educator  
Simple and Profound  
Frugal Meals  
Attention, Vigilance and Prayer  
Voluntary Sleep  
Forgetfulness  
Open, Unavoidable, Love  
Joy of the Resurrection  
Hymns of the Church  
Church Unity  
Boundless Love for Christ and for Each Person  
Respect for Formalities Not Worship of Them  
A Saint in the Middle of the City  
You've Got Me into Trouble  
First the Will of God  
Initiation into the Earthly Uncreated Church  
Did You Understand?  
Sit Down, Don't Leave  
Adversaries and Negators



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